FORMS AND METHODS:
TEACHING ATHEISM AND RELIGION IN THE MARI REPUBLIC,
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

by

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In loving-guessing memory
of my grandparents, Karl Lührmann (1892-1978) and Käte Lührmann
née Emkes (1907-1997),
who were, among other things, rural school teachers,
and bequeathed me a riddle about what happens to people
as they move between ideological systems.

Acknowledgements

On the evening of January 18, 2006, over tea between vespers and the midnight mass in honor of the feast of the Baptism of Christ, the Orthodox priest of one of Marij El's district centers questioned the visiting German anthropologist about her views on intellectual influence. "You have probably read all three volumes of *Capital*, in the original?" – Some of it, I cautiously admitted. "Do you think Marx wrote it himself?" – I said that I supposed so. "And I tell you, it was satan who wrote it through his hand." I remember making a feeble defense in the name of interpretative charity, saying that it seemed safer to assume that human authors were capable of their own errors, but could not always foresee the full consequences of their ideas. The priest seemed unimpressed, but was otherwise kind enough to sound almost apologetic when he reminded me that as a non-Orthodox Christian, I had to leave the church after the prayers for the catechumens, before the beginning of the liturgy of communion. As that moment would come around 2 a.m. and it was thirty below outside, he even gave me permission to sit on a bench at the back of the church instead of actually leaving the building, and told me to be sure to stay for tea and breakfast after the service.

Being mindful, then, that it is a difficult task to account for the sources of one's ideas, I would like to acknowledge some of the debts I incurred in the course of my dissertation research. I am thankful first of all to interlocutors like Father Nikolaj, who

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I would not have written a dissertation that is largely about pedagogy had I not been blessed throughout my life with better teachers than anyone might hope for. At Michigan, my advisor Alaina Lemon has been a tactful and perceptive guide through the vicissitudes of academic life, and a thorough reader of several versions of this manuscript. Among the members of my dissertation committee, I thank Webb Keane for intellectual generosity and a talent for asking the most difficult questions, Douglas Northrop for a creative sense of what is possible with archival sources, and William Rosenberg for help with everything from immigration paperwork to understanding what history is, and for countless cups of chai. Beyond the committee, I have benefited from discussions with Paul C. Johnson, Valerie Kivelson, Brian Porter, Ronald Suny, and Katherine Verdery. Special thanks are due to Rudolf Mrázek for always appearing at the right moment, and for insisting that I include the devil in the acknowledgements.

In its limitations as well as in any potential for depth and breadth that there may be, my understanding of what it means to practice a religion was influenced by the clergy and congregations of churches I have attended: the Evangelical-Lutheran congregation of Niederweimar; St. Mark's Church in Frankfurt-Bockenheim; Concordia Lutheran Church in Pullman, Washington; University Lutheran Chapel in Berkeley, California; Lord of

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Finally, I am grateful that much-missed Jona was with me when I started to write this dissertation, and that Philipp accompanied me on a wrap-up visit to Marij El in September 2008. Thanks to big brother Fedya for his patience and good humor, and most of all, to Ilya Vinkovetsky for a life that has room for all of this. To my parents, Renate and Dieter Lührmann, I am indebted for more than I can know or remember. Perhaps of most immediate relevance, I thank them for having taught me to think of religion not as the limit of all reason, but as an aspect of life worthy of the full exercise of all human faculties.

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Note on translation, transliteration, and orthography

Materials for this dissertation were predominantly in Russian, to some degree also in Mari, a Finno-Ugric language of the Volga-Finnish branch. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Throughout the text, Mari terms and phrases are underlined, terms in Russian and occasional other Soviet and European languages are *italicized*.

In contemporary Russia, Mari is written in the same Cyrillic script as Russian, with the additional letters ӱ (Latin transliteration: ü), pronounced like French "u" or German "ü", ӧ (Latin transliteration: ö), pronounced like French "eu" or German "ö," and ҥ (Latin transliteration: ng), pronounced roughly like "ng" in English "sing." To avoid discrepancies between transliterations of Russian and Mari, I modify the Library of Congress system, and use "j" (pronounced like the "y" in English "yes") to transliterate the letter й (i-kratkoe) and to indicate the beginning of soft vowels: *jazyk*, jumo.

Like English, Russian and Mari orthography requires capitalization only for proper names, leaving open its optional use to indicate respect. Whether or not to capitalize the names of divinities, religious denominations, or sacred scriptures is an ideological decision in the atheist and religious literatures which form much of the material for this study. When translating written texts, I follow the choices of capitalization made in the original; when quoting oral speech, I capitalize in those cases where I imagine the speaker would have done so.

Introduction

Atheism, secularity, and postsecular religion

Secularism is entering into social science discussions with a bad name. The term appears to have joined Enlightenment, orientalism, and liberalism as ciphers for the background assumptions of western modernity that critical scholars are expected to question and expose. Adding to an older critique of the secularization thesis as a totalizing and unilineal narrative about modernity,[1] scholars such as Gil Anidjar (2006) and Saba Mahmood (2006) have analyzed secularist doctrine as an instrument of Christian supremacy and U.S. hegemony.

An interesting aspect of this critique is the claim that secular modes of thinking are so ingrained in all of us that being critical of them is at once necessary and extremely difficult. Talal Asad, whose book *Formations of the Secular* is having a seminal influence on much anthropological debate on the subject, writes that "the secular is so much part of our modern life, it is not easy to grasp it directly." He suggests approaching the secular through "its shadows," discursive practices that seem to present particular challenges to secular imaginaries, such as pain, cruelty, and myth (Asad 2003: 16). Saba Mahmood (2005) has explored in detail the assumptions about agency and freedom that make it difficult for what she calls "secular liberals" to understand women's engagement

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[1] For examples of this critique that also give useful overviews over the wider literature, see Bruce 1992 and C. Smith 2003.

in the Egyptian piety movement. And anthropologists working on Protestant evangelicals often discuss the difficulties they encountered in the field in terms of clashes between the normative atheism of their discipline and interlocutors who were obviously part of modernity, but lived by very different assumptions about the enchantment or disenchantment of the world (Crapanzano 2000; Fauboin 2001; Goldstein 1995; Harding 1987, 2000; Robbins 2003; see also Ewing 1994 on another religious tradition).

The assumption everywhere seems to be that as social scientists we live in a world so imbued with the secular that it is hard for us to see it and grasp its implications, so that it needs to be intentionally defamiliarized and subjected to thorough critique, quite different from the sympathetic attempt to understand with which anthropologists and historians tend to approach other people's ways of thinking.[2] It is telling that when it comes to empirical materials used in anthropological discussions of the secular, religious subjects and their relationship to secular paradigms usually take center stage.[3] With a few exceptions in work on Turkey and India (Klimkeit 1971; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Özyürek 2006), committed secularists - the "village atheist" in Clifford Geertz's terminology – appear far more rarely in social science literature (Geertz 1973a: 123).

This dissertation is about Soviet atheism and its relationship to post-Soviet religion. While partly following the trend of investigating secularism through its effects on religious practice, it also devotes attention to the aspirations, practices, and tribulations of Soviet activists who followed the official imperative to build an atheist

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[2] The idea that one should adopt a more critical stances toward concepts from one's own tradition than toward those of the people one studies seems to be tacitly espoused by many anthropologists and also a fair number of historians, although it is rarely given explicit expression. For a principled defense of this idea, see Asad 1986; for a critique, see Gellner 1970.

[3] The ethnographies by Crapanzano, Fauboin, Mahmood, and Harding cited above can serve as examples of this trend; Buckser 1996 is another study that focuses on religious responses to secularization and secularism.

society. In the course of analysis, I found no good reason for treating the atheists as familiar foils for critiquing liberal-enlightenment-secular assumptions, while extending the customary ethnographic charity of suspension of disbelief to the religious activists alone. As readers will see, the atheist scholars and propagandists whom one encounters in Soviet archival documents are exotic enough, as they grapple with such questions as how to come up with statistically grounded proofs of the harmful effects of religion; how to explain to someone with an elementary school education what proteins are and how life could have originated from them; and how to use sensory impressions for changing an audience's convictions and behavior.

In their assumptions about human motivations and the dynamics of persuasion, as well as in the complex institutional relations in which they worked, these atheists are strange as well as familiar to a North-American-trained academic, much like the post-Soviet religious activists. There has also been considerable cross-over between both groups over time, as I will discuss later in this introduction. One contribution that a study of Soviet atheism can make to the anthropology of secularism is to invite us to approach the varieties of secularism and their associated practices and metaphysics with curiosity for the unknown, rather than in a spirit of critique of what we already know.

Was Soviet society secular?

As an example of the strange familiarity of Soviet atheism, consider such a form of atheist propaganda as the "Evening of miracles without miracles." I describe this form in more detail in chapter 2, but for now it is enough to know that it is a series of demonstrations of chemical experiments designed to demonstrate the superior

explanatory powers of science, often framed by a lecture and a concert featuring skits and songs. In the Mari ASSR, the autonomous republic on the Middle Volga that forms the focus of this dissertation, members of the atheist club of the republic's teachers' training college toured villages in the 1960s and 1970s with performances of the "Miracles without miracles." The following string of couplets from a *chastushka* (a Russian genre of teasing song made up of four-liners improvised to a set tune) comes from the radio broadcast of a performance in April of 1972:

На горе стоит береза,
под горою стоит дуб.
Раньше мы ходили в церковь
А теперь мы ходим в клуб.

On the hilltop stands a birch tree,
At the bottom stands an oak.
We used to go to church
But now we go to the club.

Не форси, форсун, часами,
Я тобой не дорожу.
Ты венчаться хочешь в церкви
А я в церковь не хожу.

Don't show off, you braggart, for hours,
You mean nothing to me.
You want to get married in the church
But I don't go to church.

Комсомольца полюбила,
Сразу изменилася.
Крест на шее не носила,
Богу не молилася.

I fell in love with a Komsomol guy,
And changed at once.
I wore a cross around my neck no more,
No longer prayed to god.

Не звоните, не презвоньте
Во всю мощь колокола.
Не заманят меня в церковь
Вера в бога отжила.

Don't ring, don't toll
The bells with all your might.
They won't lure me into church
Faith in god has outlived itself.

Что нам Петр, что нам Павел,
Что нам богородица?
Мы обходимся без вас и
Урожаем кормимся.

What do we need Peter for, what Paul,
What the mother of god?
We are doing fine without you and
Feed on the harvest.[4]

At first glance, these couplets are organized are familiar tropes of modernity: oppositions of old and new (church versus club), passive and active (reliance on saints versus human

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[4] From the radio show *Priglashaem k razgovoru*, produced by Antonina Aleksandrova, April 23, 1972. Mari Republican Radio sound archives, Joshkar-Ola, Tape 810.

self-reliance), captivity to custom and liberation (wearing the cross versus taking it off). The underlying denial of the existence of non-human intentional agents is among the background assumptions of secularism that most western-educated academics tend to take for granted (Chakrabarty 2000). But when it comes to explaining how people move from old to new modes of behavior, the text departs from mere rationalism toward a gendered deployment of emotion: the narrator (grammatically marked as female in the past tense verbs of the text) has made the change from tradition to modernity in the context of choosing a new object of attachment – a member of the Communist youth organization instead of a traditional peasant who dreams of a church wedding. In the context of the performance, where the text is set to a joyful, lively tune performed by young women's voices accompanied by a harmonica, we are further led to ask about the theory of human motivation that underlies Soviet attempts to promote secularist convictions. In the concluding words of author and radio host Antonina Aleksandrova, "the evening was interesting and joyful, and without a doubt it was useful for those present."[5] How does the performance embody the qualities of "interesting" (*interesno*), "joyful" (*veselo*), and "useful" (*polezno*), and what do these qualities tell us about the kind of secular public which the atheist club was founded to promote? How did didactic performances such as the Miracles without miracles shape the intellectual and affective dynamics of public life?

These preliminary questions are meant to suggest that Soviet secularity can invite as much ethnographic curiosity as contemporary religion. But of course, by some standards official Soviet atheism was not "secular" at all. In the first part of this introduction, I will outline three possible objections to considering Soviet atheism as a

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[5] Mari Republican Radio sound archives, Joshkar-Ola, Tape 810.

version of secularism: the argument that a secular society is one in which nothing is removed from the reach of communicative reason; the argument that a secular society is one in which religion is privatized; and the argument that Soviet atheism existed on paper only and had no social consequences beyond purely repressive measures. For each objection, I will discuss the assumptions about the secular that sustain it. I argue in favor of taking Soviet atheists seriously as secularists, and of developing ways of talking about the relationship between secular and religious spheres that might allow us to do so. In the second part of the introduction I outline some theoretical tools that might help us think about this relationship in relation to post-Soviet Russia.

Objection 1: The secular as a product of communicative action

One possible objection to considering Soviet society as secular has to do with a common way of defining the secular by opposition to an absolute sacred. As some scholars would argue, a society is secular only if it not only denies religion any public role, but generally functions without any transcendent values, any absolute truths that are beyond the negotiating powers of its members. Habermasian *Öffentlichkeit* is an attempt to imagine the processes that would hold such a society together (Habermas 1962, 1988). The socialist states of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, with their communist parties as arbiters of truth and Marxism-Leninism as a source of near-unquestionable dogma, do not meet the criteria of a "society without idols," as the Princeton theologian Richard Fenn (2001) calls this version of a secular society. In a truly secular society there would be no place for the sort of state-backed atheist propaganda that is at the center of the archival

materials used in this dissertation. Its future teachers would not be sent out to persuade villagers that it is bad to marry a churchgoing peasant.

This notion of the secular seems to depend on a Durkheimian notion of the sacred, which is not defined by assumptions about the existence of divine or spiritual beings, but by its character of being set apart from and opposed to the profane (Durkheim 1998 [1914]). A secular society would then be one in which nothing is held sacred, a definition which opens up a critique of the conceits of secularism by pointing out how self-proclaimed secular states place themselves and their symbols in the position of the sacred. Christel Lane, in one of the earliest studies of Soviet state rituals to be published in English, refers explicitly to Durkheim when she characterizes these rituals as only partially secular – they refer to temporal social relations rather than transcendent truths and mythical time, but they lift these relations out of the realm of the negotiable, thereby sacralizing them (1981: 36).

If the secular is defined as the absence of a Durkheimian sacred, it is easy to argue that all modern nation states disqualify themselves from being secular, since all of them demand some loyalty of their citizens that is not negotiable in processes of communicative reason.[6] Applied to the Soviet Union, this view of the secular as the absence of anything sacred turns into the charge that communism was just another religion, merely masquerading as secularist doctrine.[7]

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[6] This seems to be a common line of argument in studies of the debate about veiling in French public schools. See Asad 2006; Carens and Williams 1998; J. W. Scott 2007.

[7] This charge was made by prominent Russian and continental European émigrés, often in the context of arguments for the essential similarity of the "totalitarian" movements of Bolshevism, Fascism, and National Socialism (Berdyaev 1932; Gurian 1952; Riasanovsky 1993 [1963]: 470; Sinjavskij 2001 [1988]; Voegelin 1993 [1938]). For these critics, religion stands for irrationality and the all-embracing totality of a world view that tolerates no competition. Religious metaphors were also used by sympathizers of the Soviet Union to signify importance and solemnity. In his essay about a visit to Moscow, Walter Benjamin writes somewhat disapprovingly of a "cult" of Lenin's image (1955 [1927]: 66), but when he notes that classroom

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Intriguingly, a similar notion of the sacred often appears in theories of secularity that do not seek to make this disqualifying move. In their edited volume *Secular ritual*, Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff argue that since Durkheim's understanding of the sacred was so broad as to include the symbols and rituals of the French Revolution, a range of non-religious frameworks of formalized action can be analyzed as secular rituals (1977: 23). Civil religion theorists also draw on Durkheim to analyze the uses of the sacred for creating cohesion in collectives that may not share common gods or spirits (Bellah 1967; Chidester 2005; Kapferer 1988). When it comes to discussing Soviet atheism, historians and cultural theorists often adopt a language of functional substitution that is reminiscent of this Durkheimian legacy. In the course of the Bolshevik revolution, this narrative goes, religious symbols were replaced by secular analogies: icons by the portraits of communist leaders, religious holidays by socialist ones, religious creeds by party documents such as the Moral Code of the Builders of Communism of 1961. Describing what was known as the Lenin cult in the Soviet Union, the historian Nina Tumarkin writes: "Stylized portraits and busts of Lenin were its icons, his idealized biography its gospel, and Leninism its sacred writings" (1983: 3). In a similar vein, the political scientist Oleg Kharkhordin (1999) has interpreted Stalin-era practices of group cohesion and individuation as new instantiations of Orthodox monastic practices. Such ideas of continuity and substitution seem to rely on an underlying notion of an unchanging sacred, which the socialist state appropriates to itself by linking its symbols to its own institutions.

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walls hung with children's drawings are "temple walls" (57) with gifts dedicated to the collective, there is no tone of irony or disapproval.

The theory of functional substitution of religious by secular elements is useful for understanding the ideas held by Soviet secularizers themselves. Propaganda materials such as posters or songs were organized around oppositions between religious symbols, cast as outdated and silly, and symbols of a Soviet modernity in which "faith in god has outlived itself," in the words of the couplets I quoted earlier. The church is juxtaposed to the club, trust in the saints and the mother of god to reliance on human labor. The idea that the religious and the secular stood in a relationship of functional equivalence and temporal succession was expressed in such demonstrative acts of the early decades of Soviet rule as turning houses of worship into cinemas or graveyards into parks (Dragadze 1993), and in the practice of introducing socialist holidays to coincide with commonly observed religious ones (Petrone 2000; Rolf 2006). Leon Trotsky, who was one of the driving figures of Soviet cultural policy before his falling-out with Stalin, offered a concise expression of this view in a 1923 essay entitled "Vodka, the church and the cinema:" "The cinema competes not only with the tavern, but also with the church. And this rivalry may become fatal for the church if we make up for the separation of the church from the socialist state by the fusion of the socialist state and the cinema" (Trotsky 1973 [1923]: 39).

If replacing the church with the cinema and appropriating the cinema's cultural power to the state had been all there was to Soviet secularization, one would be justified to argue that there was nothing particularly secular about it, or that secularism is just another name for consolidating the power of a modern state.[8] Soviet atheists themselves,

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[8] The latter argument has often been made about processes of state-backed secularization. See Navaro-Yashin 2002 on Turkey, J. W. Scott 2007 on France, and Yang 2004 on the People's Republic of China. Though Yang and Navaro-Yashin draw on Foucault in their emphasis on the state as an agent modern power, there are echoes here of a Marxist distrust of state bureaucracies as agents of mystification (Debord

as committed as they were to strategic substitutions of secular symbols and practices for

religious ones, often recognized the limitations of this approach, as shown by the

controversies around the "Evening of miracles without miracles." As I discuss in chapter

2, the concern was that viewers might miss the message about the fundamental

incompatibility of science and religion, and conclude that science produced "miracles"

analogous to religious ones. Taken too literally, functional equivalence could thus

undermine the aims of atheist propaganda.

Post-war training materials on atheist propaganda called for approaches that

focused not on discrediting religious narratives or denouncing deceptive clerics, but on

spreading what was known as a "scientific world view" among the population. Some of

these materials explicitly addressed the need for atheism to be qualitatively different from

the religious sensibilities it sought to replace. In this sense, theorists of Soviet scientific

atheism might have agreed with Talal Asad (2003: 25) that "the secular" has a more

elusive content than being simply religion in another garb. Asad's approach to the secular

offers an alternative to views that see it as a functional substitute for religion. In his

genealogies of concepts of secular liberalism that stand in apparent continuity with

Christian ones, he pays attention to subtle shifts in associated sensibilities, practices, and

relationships to other concepts: for instance, he notes that the meaning of "myth" shifts

from a speech act to a symbolic narrative in the course of a European intellectual history

that was shaped by both theological and secular developments, and that the term

"sacred," when applied to modern state symbols, implies a far more integrated whole and

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1992 [1967]). There is also a Christian theological critique of situations where the state strives to be the only legitimate manifestation of community. In the understanding of these authors, this is a false secularity, whereas true secularity involves the Augustinian insistence that the city of God is not the same as any earthly power, and that no earthly ruler is God (Fenn 2001; Morozov 2008; Schieder 2001).

is used far more frequently than in medieval Catholic imaginaries (Asad 2003: 34-36, 43). The sacred that is imagined as the opposite of the secular in modern Europe turns out to be quite different from the religious sacred that furnished the term.

The more sophisticated Soviet atheist practitioners would have agreed with Asad that being secular meant not so much the absence of absolutes, but living in a society governed by different affective regimes and different hierarchies of concepts and values than those that held sway in a religious one. As activists rather than analysts, Soviet atheists consciously tried to bring about such changes. New socialist holidays, though deliberately timed to coincide with and replace religious (mainly Russian Orthodox Christian) holidays or periods of fasting, were also said to create different moods than religious ones. Where, in the words of a 1963 lecture text about new Soviet traditions, religious holidays were characterized by a pessimistic mood of submission "to an imaginary god, fear of the afterlife, disbelief in the power of science and the force of the human being" (Anonymous 1963: 25), Soviet holidays had the task of being joyful, optimistic, inspiring creativity and confidence in the future.

Likewise, a park that was created on the grounds of a former cemetery was not simply the Soviet equivalent of a cemetery, but a space governed by quite different rules and carrying different affective associations. In the Volga region as elsewhere in rural Russia (Paxson 2005: 340-342), cemeteries are enclosed spaces that the living only visit on certain days during the year under observance of ritual precautions and dress codes, whereas the new parks were demonstratively open, blending into the surrounding streets, and were promoted year-round as places of leisure, dancing, and socializing between men and women. In the *chastushki* couplets quoted above, going to the club instead of going

to church is not a simple change of destination, but comes in conjuncture with a different choice of venue to mark important rites of passage – no more church marriage – new objects of affection – the Komsomol member instead of the churchgoer – and a rejection of behaviors that mark dependence on extrahuman forces, such as wearing a baptismal cross or observing disciplines of prayer.

Thus, to answer the first objection to considering the Soviet Union as a secular society: It is true that the communist party and the state claimed functions of absolute arbiters of truth that were non-negotiable. But to argue that the sole effect of the Bolshevik revolution was that state institutions and practices replaced religious ones as sites of the sacred is to overlook the different affective, temporal, and ontological regimes associated with the change. But if we recognize that Soviet atheists sought to deliberately introduce new frameworks for personal behavior in order to create a qualitatively new society, this leads to a second possible objection to considering the Soviet Union as secular: Whereas classical secularization theory linked secularization to the privatization of religion, Soviet secularization was about the insistence that citizens' private beliefs and practices mattered publicly and therefore had to change. This may not seem like a very serious objection after the sustained critique that the idea of the privatization of religion as a necessary condition for secular modernity has received from such scholars as José Casanova (1994). But Soviet atheists did not even pretend to consider religion a private matter, and this may force us to rethink the connection between secularism and liberalism that scholarship on secularism in India, the Middle East or western Europe often seems to take for granted.

Objection 2: Secularism as privatization of religion

There are of course similarities between Marxism-Leninism and liberalism, for instance the faith in progress and in the universality of scientific reason. Even the idea of religion as a private matter was not entirely foreign to the Soviet Union: the constitutional guarantee of freedom of conscience was translated into laws and directives that made the family the only legitimate place for the transmission of religious values, and prohibited religious organizations from engaging in lay education, youth work, or charitable activities (Pospielovsky 1987a, b). Observers have noted that this led to a constriction of religious practices to domestic and in-group contexts, to a restriction of access to religious knowledge, and often to a feminization of religious expertise (Balzer 1980; Humphrey 1998; Rogers 2004; Wanner 2007). The British anthropologist Tamara Dragadze (1993) has called this the "domestication" of religion in the Soviet Union. Domestication, not privatization, because the same constitution that guaranteed freedom of religious confession also guaranteed the freedom of anti-religious propaganda, meaning that the domestic arrangements of citizens could be targeted for didactic intervention.

A passionate expression of how Soviet atheism justified interventions in a citizen's life in the name of the social good is the letter to the editor from *Pravda* which I quote in chapter 8. The author exhorts readers not to give up the dead to priests and deacons, but to assert the loyalty of the institutionalized collective to "one of ours." The *chastushki* lyrics quoted at the beginning of this introduction can be read as a comparable assertion of collective care. The musical prescriptions for proper objects of love define religious practice as motivated by personal affection, but simultaneously treat such

affection as not a matter of private preference, but an object of legitimate public concern and institutional intervention.

What is secular about the Soviet state's interventions in courtship and funerals is that both happened with the constant insistence that nothing exists and nothing matters beyond the community of the living in this world. "To the dead, of course, it's all the same, but children and grandchildren are growing," warns the *Pravda* letter (see chapter 8), while the female voice of the *chastushki* rejoices that her love for a Komsomol member has eliminated any need for superhuman comfort or protection. What is non-liberal is that public institutions such as clubs and trade unions unapologetically bear responsibility for shaping and directing the joys and sorrows of citizens.

Weddings and funerals become sites of atheist intervention because Soviet propaganda strongly associated religiosity with states of social isolation (not being loved, or loving to the exclusion of social duties) and events that threaten the social fabric, most prominently, death. Religion, one could say, was not privatized, but rather cast as anti-social. The budding sociology of religion of the late 1960s and early 1970s Soviet Union offers ample illustrations of this view. Groping for empirical proof of the harm of religion, the measure sociologists came up with was to show a correlation between professed religious belief and non-participation in modern Soviet social activities. As I discuss in chapter 1, studies conducted in the Mari Republic in 1972 and 1985 as part of a number of regional studies coordinated by the Institute for Scientific Atheism in Moscow showed that religious believers read fewer books per month than atheists and visited the cinema less frequently, were less likely to be engaged in trade union or other voluntary

work, and were more inclined to pay attention to ethnicity in their choice of friends and their children's choice of marriage partners.

These arguments for the harm of religion show that Soviet society's claim to secularity lay not in being neutral with respect to the private convictions of its members,[9] but in casting any relationship with non-human, extra-social forces as incompatible with full membership. While one might doubt the accuracy of their statistics, these atheist sociologists invite us to see the secular as a realm of exclusively human and exclusively contemporary sociality that stands in a necessary tension to the nonhuman forces with which religious practitioners engage. They see society as quite opposed to the sacred, rather than being its true referent, as Durkheim would have it. In their idea of secularity, they might have agreed with Charles Taylor, who defines a society as secular when it is built exclusively on "contemporary common action" (2004: 93), i.e. relations between living human beings, and in a later work has argued that the possibility of exclusive humanism as a lived orientation is what marks modernity as secular (Taylor 2007).

Together with Taylor, the atheist sociologists thus supply the definition of religion and secularity that I rely on in this study: religion is understood as a view of life and social relations in which living human beings are not the only agents capable of meaningful interaction, while secularism is a view of exclusively contemporary human sociality (compare also Höhn 2007: 65-72; Keane 1997: 48). There are of course myriads of other definitions of religion,[10] but this one is most helpful in seeing the stakes of the

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[9] The possibility of state neutrality in religious matters has rightly been questioned by critical studies of secularity and regimes of religious freedom. See Sullivan 2005 on the United States, and several of the articles relating to India in Bhargava 1998.

[10] For an overview of the history of defining religion, see W. C. Smith 1991 [1962]: 15-50, for overviews of anthropological debates on the topic see Hultkrantz 1970; Lambek 2000. The question whether there can or should be a general definition of religion is controversial (see Asad 1993; Riesebrodt 2007: 43-74). I

struggle between Soviet atheists and the people they tried to convince of the benefits of secular outlooks.

The point where Soviet atheists differ from Taylor is when the latter, following Habermas, thinks of secular communicative action as ideally self-regulating and open-ended. From the point of view of Soviet propaganda, people who insisted on the need for the mediation of church rites or who refused to socialize with others on grounds of their ethnicity behaved in ways that were destructive of the social fabric. Such deviant voices could only be included in public debate as quotations in the context of authoritative criticism. Rejecting the liberal formula of making religion a matter of private preference without consequence for public encounters between rights-bearing subjects, Soviet society's claim to secularity rested on treating religious ideas as inherent obstacles to public solidarity. Because obstacles had to be overcome through education, the Soviet public sphere was unapologetically structured as a didactic discussion mediated by party-controlled organs. Religious voices were present in this discussion, but only as negative examples.

Objection 3: Soviet atheism as lacking social consequence

The importance of didactic interventions in the service of Soviet secularity raises the question how successful, or at least consequential, these interventions were. Which brings us to a final potential objection to considering Soviet society as secular: the claim that atheist propaganda was mainly perfunctory, existed on paper more than in reality, and had few actual effects. This claim has been made by historians of Stalin-era atheist

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tend to agree with Martin Riesebrodt that the Christian West was not the only historical context to produce a category for human practices that relate to non-human realities.

propaganda such as Daniel Peris (1998) and, in a less pronounced form, William

Husband (2000). The dramatic rise in numbers of self-identified religious believers (and

decline of self-identified atheists) that followed the collapse of Soviet socialism appears

to support the view that atheist convictions were expressed out of fear and conformity

rather than being deeply held.[11] The idea that atheist propaganda was perfunctory

resonates with a more general claim made by students of post-war, post-Stalinist Soviet

culture, namely that citizens' participation in all officially mandated activities was a

meaningless routine devoid of any interest or passionate engagement (Grant 1995: 131-

132; Humphrey 1998; Kharkhordin 1999: 334; Suny 1998: 438-439; Wolfe 2005: 21).

Though critical of the preoccupation with furtive resistance to official ideology in parts of

this literature, Alexei Yurchak's (2006) recent book paints a similar picture of late

socialism when he speaks of participation in official activities as being "pure pro forma,"

effortless performances of normal Soviet personhood rather than occasions to engage

with the referential meaning of ideological statements.

　　　Although there is some truth in this picture of late Soviet society, to conclude

from it that propaganda was inconsequential means adopting an unnecessarily narrow

view of what propaganda is and where one might look for its effects. Much of the

historical analysis in this dissertation aims at enriching our understanding of the

meanings of late Soviet propaganda for those who conducted it. As the example of the

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[11] In the Mari republic, the region under study here, percentages of declared religious believers in sociological surveys rose from 13.5 percent in 1985 to 43 percent in 1994, and from there to 68.2 percent in 2004 (the last figure including the new option of stating that one was a believer, but did not observe religious rites). Over the same period, the percentage of self-declared atheists and/or non-believers went down from 32.2 percent in 1985 (to which can be added 37.8 percent of respondents who declared to be indifferent towards religion) to 18.4 percent in 1994 and 16.6 percent in 2004 (Shabykov et al. 2005: 10, 346; Solov'ev 1987: 118). This percentage of declared non-believers is on the low end of Russia-wide averages: In the surveys conducted by a Russian-Finnish team under Dmitrij Furman and Kimmo Kaariajnen, the combined categories of unbelievers and atheists made up 42 percent of the Russian population in 1991, 35 in 1993, and 20 in 2004 (Furman and Kaariajnen 2006: 48).

Evening of Miracles without miracles shows, atheist propaganda in the post-war Soviet Union was geared toward engaging religion indirectly, through offering access to what was known as "a scientific world view" rather than explicitly attacking religious convictions. From the moment the pre-war League of the Militant Godless was officially disbanded in 1947, there was no organization in the Soviet Union whose sole mission was atheist propaganda. Rather, the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (renamed *Obshchestvo "Znanie"*, Knowledge Society, in 1963), an association of scholars and intellectuals whose membership ranged from Moscow academicians to village school teachers, became simultaneous heir to the League of the Godless and to pre-war organizations devoted to popularizing scientific knowledge (Andrews 2003). The Knowledge Society's section of atheist propaganda sent lecturers to enterprises, collective farms, and village culture clubs. Atheist events were also organized through Communist Party divisions of propaganda and agitation, and through atheist clubs that existed in schools and universities (Peris 1998; Powell 1975).

One of the major functions of the Knowledge Society was to train its members through regional and union-wide seminars and to create and distribute resources – known as "methodical aids" – that enabled members and non-members to conduct scientific propaganda. In the Mari republic, the Evening of Miracles was performed by the atheist club of an educational institution, but under the direction of a member of the Knowledge Society, using a form that had been disseminated through the Society's training network.

Where might one locate the social effects of organizations like the Knowledge Society? The Knowledge Society and party-sponsored propaganda operated through networks that were designed to be centrally directed, but use a minimal amount of central

resources. This meant, for instance, that atheist concerts or lectures were centrally mandated, but rarely fully scripted, relying on a great deal of local improvisation. A few brochures with lecture texts were printed each year in Moscow, and more texts were written in regional centers and mimeographed in small editions. But, as I explain in chapter 3, lists of recommended lecture titles were far more ubiquitous. Forms such as the Evening of Miracles were popularized with the help of schematic instructions for the set-up of experiments, along with printed collections of atheist songs and poetry.

Soviet propaganda was thus directed through the circulation of titles and schematic descriptions of "forms", rather than through sending out lecturers from the center or providing all local lecturers with identical scripts. This presupposes local people skilled in reading the intentions behind titles and able to assemble the necessary materials and human talents to animate pre-approved forms. In its material organization, Soviet propaganda relied on a population not necessarily of convinced or enthusiastic followers, but of people who could be taught to internalize doctrinary orthodoxy enough to generate it themselves with the help of some cues, rather than merely enact it.

Such reliance on the generative competence of local performers was probably due in part to the constraints of the socialist "economy of shortage" (Kornai 1992). Circulating lecture titles requires less paper, ink, and space in postal trains than circulating full texts. But I would like to suggest that these constraints were among the mechanisms through which Soviet propaganda became socially effective. In my interviews with people now active in religious organizations, I encountered many memories of being drawn into propaganda activities based on particular skills: a Lutheran pastor remembered being asked to participate in the Evenings of Miracles during his

student years because of his skill in reciting poetry; an artist and woodcarver now working on the restoration of several churches remembered being put in charge of painting posters and wall newspapers during his time as a factory worker; and one of the Knowledge Society's few remaining lecturers talked about the gift of tact in dealing with diverse audiences that had made her a good lecturer. These and other respondents differed in their retrospective evaluations of the contents of their work, but all shared a sense of pride in their skills.

Having come of age during the decades of the so-called "era of stagnation" under Brezhnev, these people were members of the late Soviet generation that is so often described as generally apathetic toward official ideology. It might be said that their engagement was rarely voluntary, and that they are examples of relatively small numbers of activists not representative for the population as a whole. But my point is that the very conditions under which they worked challenge the picture of effortless, cynical reproduction of required discursive positions painted by Yurchak and others. Far more than easy cynicism, the difficulties of doing propaganda work, and the satisfaction of overcoming these difficulties, loomed large in these people's memories: feats of obtaining required materials in spite of deficits, the puzzlement of being asked to do "atheist work" but not being told what exactly would count as such, and the difficulty of understanding pre-circulated materials and presenting them in such a way as would be interesting to local audiences. As has been recognized in francophone scholarship on *laïcité* in republican France, where secularist aspirations also played out first and foremost in the educational system, being a teacher in the service of a secular society had

to do with "passion" as well as with "reason" (Baubérot 2004; see also Ozouf and Ozouf 1992).

Didactic concerns were relevant to more than a small number of committed activists. What large numbers of people were required to maintain propaganda networks is suggested by the case of the closing of the last functioning Orthodox church in Joshkar-Ola, the capital of the Mari Republic. In an interval of just three days in August of that year, 110 enterprises, medical and educational institutions held assemblies of their workforce to discuss and vote on a resolution to close the church. The number of lecturers required to start each assembly with a lecture on the topic "The communist education of the toilers and the overcoming of religious prejudices at the present stage" suggests the personnel needs associated with maintaining ideological activities even in this provincial city. As my discussion of the assembly minutes in chapter 3 shows, the variations in doctrinal correctness of individual utterances at these carefully orchestrated discussions indicate how difficult it could be to reproduce ideological discourse correctly. Since state and party institutions responded to these difficulties with training efforts for propagandists at various local, regional, and union-wide levels, it can be said that one of the major effects of Soviet propaganda – including atheist propaganda – was spreading and honing didactic skills (public speaking, creating visual aids, collecting facts and illustrations) among large numbers of citizens throughout the country.

In this dissertation, I call such people with expertise in creating and applying didactic forms "methodicians", inspired by the Russian term *metodist*, a professional designation for a person in charge of programming and events planning at a culture club house, library, party house of Political Enlightenment, or other such institution. During

my fieldwork, I encountered many former professional or amateur methodicians in religious organizations. Retired teachers, journalists, college instructors, actors, and trade union activists were now serving as clergy, organizing Mari sacrificial ceremonies, teaching Bible studies or Quranic reading. What united these people was what I call a didactic orientation: a view of words, things, and activities in terms of their potential to influence others toward desired changes in opinion and behavior. The popularization of didactic skills, I argue, is both a pervasive effect of Soviet propaganda efforts and an important point of contact with global forms of religiosity that are sometimes labeled as "postsecular." One might argue that the official concern with changing people's convictions was effective in mobilizing citizens into the kind of social engagement that atheist theorists considered a measure of secularity, and that this secularist mobilization is now having repercussions in post-Soviet religious life.

Postsecular religion and didacticism

I am suggesting that the social effects of atheism lie in the didactic skills which people acquired in the course of propagating it. It thus may appear contradictory that I encountered many former "methodicians" in religious organizations. Can skills still be evidence of secularity when they are so readily applied to religious ends? Does the transfer prove that theories of functional equivalence are correct after all, and that propaganda *is* religious evangelism in disguise? Or does the unexpected legacy of atheist didacticism vindicate those critical analysts who argue that the secular is so ubiquitous in modern life that even contemporary religiosity is merely an aspect of it?[12] I would argue

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[12] Talal Asad seems to suggest as much when he writes: "The modern conscience is also a secular conscience, a category that subsumes moralized religion" (Asad 2003: 106).

that the relationship between atheist and religious didacticisms is more complex than either side allows for.

Studies of secularization, whether conceptualized as overall decline of religion or as the construction of a public sphere from which religious commitments and epistemologies are excluded, have often drawn attention to the fact that religion does not disappear under these conditions, but undergoes a variety of changes.[13] Callum Brown (2001) speaks of a "feminization" of Christianity in nineteenth-century Britain. The rationalist theology developed in mainstream churches during the age of industrialization is said to have produced pietistic reactions searching for personalized, emotionally charged relations with the divine (Buckser 1996; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988; D. Martin 1990), and more recently, a turn to occasional, event-centered, "festive" religiosity (Hervieu-Léger 1997: 113; see also H. Cox 1984). Grace Davie (1994) notes a shift to more individualized religious ideas as an aspect of the tendency toward "believing without belonging" in contemporary Britain. Students of so-called fundamentalisms stress that the latter are not returns to pre-modern religiosity, but depend on modern forms of mobilization, technologies of knowledge transmission, and sensibilities (Bilgrami 1992; Fauboin 2001; Harding 2000; Hirschkind 2006; Schiffauer 2001). Histories of colonial governance show how attempts of colonial administrations to set up legal systems based on secular rationality ended up reifying and solidifying religious boundaries (Galanter 1998; van der Veer 1994). Jürgen Habermas (2005) and

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[13] As important as it may be to correct earlier expectations of the disappearance of religion under modernity, the quantitative sociologist Detlef Pollack (2003: 137-138) is right to point out that these changes tend to happen within a religious field that has shrunk both in terms of the percentages of a given population that participate in religious institutions and of the relevance of religious orientations to other spheres of life, such as politics or health. Religion may not be disappearing, but the context in which the changes discussed in this section matter is still a limited one, in Russia as elsewhere in the modern world.

José Casanova (1994) point out that the participation of religious groups in the public sphere requires them to make adjustments in self-presentation, style of argument, and epistemological claims. Charles Taylor (2007) explores the effects of the possibility of radical unbelief on the social imaginaries of all members of a society, including religious believers. In an analysis more specific to the post-Soviet world, Adeeb Khalid (2007) has traced the strong association between Islam and national heritage in contemporary Central Asia to the effects of Soviet cultural policy.

All these effects of the process of secularization on religious life are relevant to the study of religion under and after Soviet atheism, and readers will encounter them in this dissertation: the feminization and "domestication" of religious expertise and the bricolage-like individualization of religious ideas and practices (chapter 8), the administrative hardening of religious boundaries and the subsumption of religion under ethnic heritage (chapter 1), and various theological reactions to the cultural dominance of secular spectacle (chapters 6 and 7). But the most important effects to be investigated are didactic techniques of mass mobilization that seem to cross over between secular and religious contexts (chapters 2, 3, and 4).

Didacticism, as I use the term in this dissertation, is an important motivating principle of these modern modes of mobilization. All religions face the problem of knowledge transmission, and those with bodies of sacred writing in particular have developed elaborate systems of formalized schooling (Ong 1982; Whitehouse 2000). But as Dale Eickelman (1992) and Brinkley Messick (1993) have noted for Islam, there is a great difference between the disciplines of learning practiced in these older centers of religious education and the methodically standardized practices of mass public education.

These modern didactic practices can, in their turn, enter into religious institutions, and in some places, notably in the fields of Protestant missions, they arguably have a religious history (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). In Russia, contemporary pedagogical practice derives from nineteenth-century reform movements of predominantly secularist orientation, reshaped and applied to a mass scale by the revolutionary Bolshevik government, which faced the predicament of how to promote a vision of scientifically-driven progress among a largely illiterate population (Brooks 1985; Froese 1963; Kirschenbaum 2001). Beyond the initial literacy drives, the Soviet government continued to invest significant resources in continuous processes of learning and teaching for large parts of the population through so-called institutions of cultural enlightenment: work-place study circles, programs at houses of culture, and day and evening programs at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools (Bartels and Bartels 1995; David-Fox 1997; Eklof 1993; Fitzpatrick 1970, 1979; Holmes 1991). Post-Soviet religious groups build up their membership among people whose childhood and youth was spent participating in the activities of these didactic networks, and imbibing their assumptions about how things are done.

One of these assumptions concerns the power of relationships of teaching and learning as instruments of mobilization. Soviet networks of popular education were structured according to a pyramidal or snowball system, where someone who was a student in one context was expected to be a teacher on a lower level.[14] In fact, a measure for the success of propaganda often applied in the press was whether it inspired others to become propagandists themselves. As we will see in chapter 2, some of the evangelical

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[14] What I call pyramidal is similar to what Wolfe (2005: 141) calls the "radial diagram of government" characteristic of the Soviet press, but I would like to point out that this pyramidal or radial structure applies not only to flows of authority and information, but also, crucially, to networks of training.

churches operating in contemporary Russia employ similar organizational models. The Protestant models come from elsewhere, raising questions about historical causality that I outline in the next section. At the least, there is a happy conjuncture between skills and habits formed in Soviet cultural work and the demands of Protestant church planting.

If didacticism is an important feature of Soviet secularity and Russian post-secular religiosity, it has implications for more than just organizational structure. As mobilized societies relying on didactic relationships to unite individuals into a structured whole, Soviet educational networks and global evangelical movements share a crucial feature of the liberal public as it has been analyzed by Michael Warner, following Jürgen Habermas. Though subject to very different mechanisms of external regulation and control (Kurilla 2002), all three form social aggregates "constituted through mere attention" (Warner 2002: 87). Both secular networks of cultural enlightenment and didacticized religion present themselves as alternatives to social imaginaries based on innate characteristics such as kinship or ancestral religion. Since the alternative attachments they offer are voluntary, they rely on catching people's attention and persuading them – hence the importance of the fact that the Evening of Miracles was not only "useful," but also "interesting" and even "joyful." The focus on interest and persuasion has consequences for how activists understand and make use of perception, speech, and the dynamics of social gatherings. These more subtle stakes of didacticism come to the fore in the later chapters of this dissertation.

Postsecularity and the riddle of elective affinity

If didacticism, as a feature of post-secular religion, is neither a sign of the functional

equivalence between religious and secular proselytizing nor proof that contemporary

religion is in itself secular, this still begs the question of a better way of conceptualizing

the relationship between the secular and the religious. The problem appears to be this: far

from being distinct phenomena that can be compared, the secular and the religious seem

to be constantly producing each other, both sides partaking of, and contributing to, the

changes that have produced modern social life. If one says, with Talal Asad, that the

secular "is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is

not the latest phase of a sacred origin) nor a simple break from it" (2003: 25), the

challenge becomes to conceptualize a range of historical relationships that lies between

the extremes of continuity and break.

In one attempt to conceptualize the diversity of possible relationships, the

Catholic theologian Hans-Joachim Höhn proposes his concept of "postsecular religion."

Attempting to capture some of the changes in religion under secularity discussed above,

Höhn distinguishes several forms of "dispersion" by which postsecular religion

penetrates into contexts that are not themselves considered religious: "deconstructed"

religious content is offered by institutions that see themselves as secular (e.g. publicly

funded colleges offering courses in mystical healing practices); "inverted" religious

symbols are used in advertising and political rhetoric to point to immanent, worldly ends;

and "diffusion" means that the precise denominational origin of ideas or practices so used

ceases to matter (Höhn 2007: 36-38). Höhn claims that media, healing practices, and even

advertising are ways in which impulses toward a transcendent world have a social

presence in the early twenty-first century, but also proposes a critique of what this dispersion does to the meaning of religion.

While differentiating between different relationships of transformation, Höhn accepts the premise that postsecularity is a novel phenomenon, the somewhat ironic endpoint of the secularization process, which dispersed and deconstructed formerly more dominant and unified religious perspectives. It may be that this sequential narrative is only true when one narrows one's historical perspective to modern Europe. The Egyptologist Jan Assmann (2002) has proposed the term "theologization" as a countermovement to secularization, and argues that many staples of Judeo-Christian religious imaginaries (such as god as just or god as entering into a covenant with people) were transpositions from the secular political thought of the ancient Orient (where justice and contracts applied to relations between people, but not between people and divinity). Assmann frames his argument as a polemic against Carl Schmitt's (2004 [1922]) claim that all political concepts derive from religious ones, a classical example of sequential accounts in which the religious necessarily precedes the secular.

Reading Assmann and Höhn together, one could say that post-Soviet Russia is going through a time of theologization of spheres of life that were previously seen as devoid of religious significance, but that theologization can involve bundles of changes that go beyond the transposition of concepts from one context to another. In terms of the definitions of religion and secularity that I have proposed, theologization means the reintroduction of significant non-human participants into contexts that have previously been thought of as exclusively human spheres of interaction. If secularization and theologization stand in a cyclical relationship with each other, this may open our eyes to

overlapping cycles of different duration – for instance, how shifts between secular and religious orientations over the individual life course articulated with changes in the broader political climate (see chapter 8).

Diagnoses such as "theologization" or "postsecularity" illuminate selected cases of resemblances and differences across religious and secular contexts. They are attempts to make analytic sense of the fact that, as many of the scholars cited in this introduction have pointed out, the secular also has a religious history, and the growing possibility of exclusive humanism in European modernity has left its traces in religious life. In order to highlight the dynamic historical relationship between these spheres and the movement of elements between them, an old concept of another theorist of religion seems useful: Max Weber's concept of "elective affinity."

While it is often used to mean little more than a vague resemblance whose causes are unknown, "elective affinity" has a more strictly defined meaning in the source from which Weber borrowed it, Johann Wolfgang Goethe's novel of the same title, published in 1809. Goethe chose his title with reference to eighteenth-century chemistry, where an "elective affinity" meant an inherent attraction between chemical elements that forces them to leave their existing association and re-amalgamate with another element, in such a way that the new amalgamation seems completely natural and indivisible, brought together "as if by higher providence" (Goethe 1956 [1809]: 37; cf. Adler 1987). When Weber applies the term to Protestant and capitalist asceticisms in *The Protestant Ethic*, he introduces it as an alternative to the causal explanatory models offered by Marxist and idealist approaches, and as a provisional label that awaits the historical analysis that follows (Weber 1922: 85). In an investigation of the concept, the sociologist Michael

Löwy concludes that at its strongest, "elective affinity" in Weber means an ongoing historical relationship of "attraction and mutual influence" between two cultural forms "on the basis of certain significant analogies, inherent or meaningful affinities" (Löwy 2004: 100).

As a description of how things come to resemble each other over time without ever being essentially the same, the term is attractive by virtue of its very temporal and causal indeterminacy, which invites the historical analysis of a concrete case rather than preempting it, as is a danger with notions of an unchangeable sacred that reappears in different symbolic garbs or of a secularity that infiltrates religious understandings. If didactic elements of religious and secular traditions stand in a relationship of elective affinity, this means that resemblances between them need to be seen in the context of an ongoing relationship over time, in which mutual influences may be so manifold that the causal question of what came first or which side is a reflection of the other's influence is replaced by questions about the fluctuating dominance of secular and religious contexts and the common capacity of both sides to change in interaction with larger historical processes. The term calls for inquiry into the histories of cultural frameworks that may be opaque to actors and analysts alike, for instance into the ways in which the didactic modes of mobilization that are a shared feature of Soviet atheism and some varieties of post-Soviet religion were co-produced by developments of western European theology and political ideas of the primacy of individuals over community (chapter 2), or how Soviet misunderstandings of icons as didactic visual aids affect post-Soviet popular understandings of icons (chapter 7).

"Elective affinity" draws attention to the mutual construction over time of secular and religious worlds, eliminating the need to claim that one is eternally prior to the other, or that one is merely a disguised version of the other. But drawing as it does on the ideas of the alchemists regarding the mysterious transformative possibilities of anorganic matter, the concept is a riddle more than an answer. The characters in Goethe's novel (two men and two women who, in the course of the novel, leave their existing affective commitments and recombine in a new constellation of lovers) discover as much as they grapple with the question whether laws of irresistible affinity apply to human relations as well. There is nothing "elective" about such a force, objects Charlotte, one of the female characters, when the chemical concept is first explained to her. She adds that human choice should be high above such necessity (Goethe 1956 [1809]: 36-37).

The causes, mechanisms, and limits of human transformability were also a continuing question for the atheist and religious activists I encountered. The repertoire of standardized pedagogical forms and methods in which the atheists sought their answers combines a highly instrumental, one might even say manipulative, view of human beings with elements of a reform pedagogical tradition that itself includes Goethe and the romantic counterenlightenment (Froese 1964; Kerr 2005). The didacticism that infuses Soviet secularity and aspects of postsecular religion is thus insufficiently described by references to a supposedly familiar framework of liberal modernity. The riddle of elective affinity may be a more appropriate guide, because it will remind us to situate secularism, Soviet or otherwise, within a complex and often contradictory intellectual history.

About the setting of the study

For addressing the questions of secularity and religion, Soviet atheism and secular modernity, this dissertation draws on materials from a small part of Russia's Volga region known today as the Republic of Marij El, and between 1923 and 1991 as the Mari Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Mari ASSR). Before introducing the religious and anti-religious landscapes of the Mari republic in more detail in chapter 1, I would like to point out some key factors that make the republic a fruitful area for an exploration of late Soviet atheist propaganda and its aftermath in post-Soviet religious life.

First is the character of the Middle Volga region as one of Russia's oldest multi-religious areas. Conquered by Muscovy in the sixteenth century during the defeat of the Khanate of Kazan' that marked the beginning of Russian eastward expansion (Kappeler 1982), this area barely 500 miles east of Moscow remains to this day a linguistically and religiously diverse region (map 1). In the 2002 census of the Russian Federation, a little less than half of Marij El's 730,000 inhabitants were ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, and other Eastern Slavs, 42 percent were Mari, and 6 percent Tatars. From the idealized viewpoint of the government of the republic, the three major ethnic groups correspond to three "traditional religions": Russian Orthodoxy is complimented by the Mari religion, whose adherents call themselves chimarij ("pure Mari") in Mari and *jazychniki* (pagans) in Russian, and by the Sunni Islam of the Tatar population.

In reality, things are more complicated. Many of the Russians who settled in the region before the twentieth century were Old Believers, Christians of Orthodox rite who reject the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate (Popov 1987). Despite rural flight that has diminished the ethnically Russian rural population over the second half of the twentieth
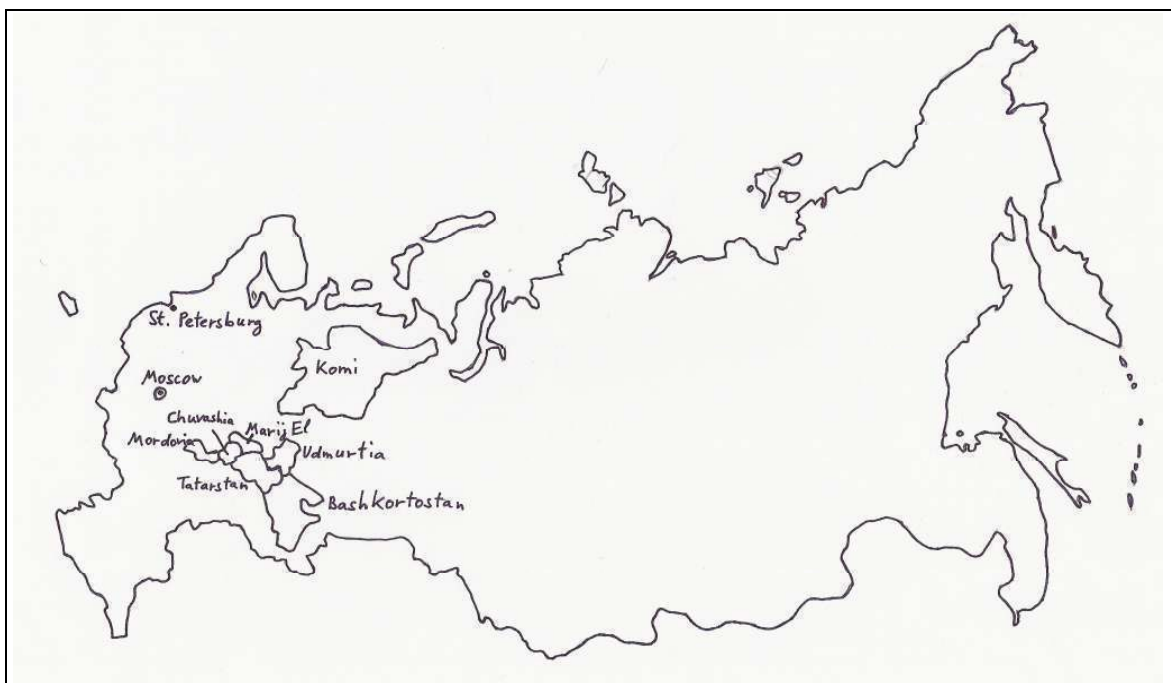
Map 1: Marij El and the other autonomous republics of the Volga-Urals region within the Russian Federation.

century, significant communities of Old Believers remain, mainly in the southwest and northeast of the republic. The Mari population of the Highland region south of the Volga River allied itself with Muscovy before the fall of Kazan'. The ensuing Orthodox missionization, reinforced by a monastic movement in the nineteenth century, made Russian Orthodoxy an important feature of Highland Mari identity. The Meadow region north of the Volga was also missionized starting from the seventeenth century, and by the time of the 1917 revolution, many villages practiced Russian Orthodoxy alongside sacrificial rituals in the sacred groves. Although significant centers of chimarij ritualism in the northeast and south of the republic persisted through the Soviet era, Orthodox Christianity is thus an important part of Mari religiosity (Werth 2002). Finally, while the overwhelming majority of the republic's Tatar population is of Muslim heritage, there are also villages of Kräshens (Christian descendents of Tatar converts) in the northeast,

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which were not classified as ethnically Tatar until the Soviet census of 1939 (Hirsch 2005: 304; Werth 2000).

The Soviet period added further complications to the ethno-religious landscape of the newly formed republic. Evangelical Christians came to the area, first with aborted attempts of Baptist evangelization in the 1920s, then with evacuees from western parts of the Soviet Union during the Second World War. By the end of the war, Baptist and Seventh-Day Adventist congregations were asking for registration, and by the 1960s, Pentecostals were making appearances in settlements along the railway line linking the republic's capital, Joshkar-Ola, to Kazan'. In the 1990s, Lutheran and Charismatic[15] communities were added to the range of Protestant congregations, all of which began to receive some form of personnel and financial support from abroad, mainly the United States and Finland (a country with which the Finno-Ugric origin of the Mari language provides a connection). By the time of my fieldwork, the Protestant congregations were undergoing deliberate indigenization of their clergy to avoid legal difficulties and counter popular perceptions of Protestants as foreign to Russia.

A further complication in the confessional picture after the Soviet period is that a large part of the republic's population has ceased to consider themselves part of any religious community. The late 1920s and 1930s marked periods of closings of churches and mosques and physical persecution of clergy and lay believers, much as in the rest of

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[15] Among the Protestant groups, Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals and Charismatics can be considered Evangelicals by virtue of the fact that they teach salvation through a one-time conversion experience that makes a person "born again," practice adult baptism, and proclaim the necessity of personal evangelism by all church members. Pentecostals are evangelical denominations that practice speaking in tongues and prophecy under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals have existed in Russia and Ukraine since before the 1917 revolution. Charismatics represent a more recent subset of Pentecostals with roots in the 1970s United States, associated with the use of modern music and media technology in worship and emphasizing the personal power, wealth and healing to be gained from a correct relationship to the Holy Spirit in prayer (see Coleman 2000; Jarygin 2004; Lunkin 2002; Wanner 2007).

the Soviet Union. Orthodox priests, mullahs, and <u>chimarij</u> priests (<u>kart-vlak</u>) were among the victims of Stalin's terror (Sanukov 2000: 129), and post-war generations were exposed to atheist propaganda at school and lived in a society in which few people had more than sporadic contact with institutionalized religion. As the figures cited in footnote 11 show, even in 2004, 13 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the declared non-believers still constituted a sizeable minority of over 15 percent.[16]

The Mari republic is thus an area of considerable religious diversity, and thus a good place to see some of the strategies of Khrushchev- and Brezhnev-era atheism, which, after the forceful attacks on religious institutions and their members in the late 1930s and the late 1950s/early 1960s failed to do away with religion, recognized a need to devise increasingly sophisticated approaches to atheist work. One strategy, in cooperation with the growing empirical social science of the time, was a diversification of approaches to different religious groups. While archival documents show more calls for such diversification than evidence that it was put into practice, it is still apparent that different religious groups posed different problems for Soviet atheism, and interacted differently with Soviet secular culture. For example, there were different administrative classifications of various religious phenomena (chapter 1), different religious appropriations of didacticism (chapters 2-4), and different theological formulations of the boundaries between secular and religious spheres (chapter 6-7), but also similarities across religious confessions in understandings of the roles of religious and secular commitments across the life cycle (chapters 1 and 8).

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[16] Survey results from other parts of Russia suggest that some of these non-believers, if asked to name their religious denomination, would still identify themselves as part of the denomination considered "traditional" for their ethnic group. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Filatov and Lunkin 2006.

In addition to its religious diversity, a second feature of the Mari republic that makes it a revealing place to study the challenges and effects of atheist propaganda is its peripheral position within the Soviet Union. Though by no means as remote as some of the Siberian areas and accessible from Moscow by overnight train, the Mari ASSR was a predominantly rural area, whose soil was far less fertile than that of the black-earth regions in southern Russia, making for relatively small and poor agricultural enterprises. Logging was a major industry, joined from the war years onward by defense industry – which, incidentally, made the republic an area closed to western visitors until the late 1980s. Mass education was a Soviet innovation, and although the education system was built up primarily in Russian, large parts of the rural population remained more fluent in Mari or Tatar than Russian up into the late twentieth century. One indication of the remoteness of the republic is that a regional chapter of the League of the Militant Godless, which had been established as an all-union organization for anti-religious struggle in 1925, was not organized until 1937.[17]

Even in later decades, propaganda work in the republic still encountered obstacles of climate, roads, language, educational level, and availability of publications and other necessary materials that are perhaps more representative of conditions for cultural work in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev than those that prevailed in the large cities that form the focus of many existing studies of late Soviet culture (Costanzo 1998; Field 2007; Reid 2002; Wolfe 2005; Yurchak 2006).[18] Archival materials and oral histories from the Mari ASSR amply testify to the great efforts it took to spread the kinds

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[17] GARME, register (*opis'*) for f. R-118, p. 1.
[18] For a lively biography of a Khrushchev- and Brezhnev-era party functionary in the North Caucasus whose predicaments in many way mirror those of his counterparts in the Mari ASSR, see Derluguian 2005. Also compare Bloch 2004 for an ethnography of a generation schooled in Soviet boarding schools in northern Siberia.

of didactic skills that, I argue, were both a key means to sustaining propaganda and form some of its most lasting legacies.

My own interest in the region arose when I worked as a Bosch Foundation fellow, teaching German at Mari State University in 2000/01. Living in Joshkar-Ola, the capital of Marij El and home to roughly one third of its population, I encountered many people who had either recently committed themselves to religious practice or were thinking about doing so. Deciding to pursue post-Soviet religious life as a dissertation topic, I considered possible Soviet pre-histories of the phenomenon. Since many of the religious practitioners I met had been raised in secular Soviet families and had had little, if any, connection to religious practice before the early 1990s,[19] I decided that I would miss much of their story if I focused on the history of religious practice and its repression during the Soviet period. Instead, I started to wonder what remained of Soviet atheism within post-Soviet religion. What were the formative, not merely repressive, effects of decades of officially mandated atheism?

Accordingly, the archival part of my research concentrated on practices, theories and training methods for atheist propaganda (and more generally for what was known as cultural enlightenment work, *kul'turno-prosvetitel'naja rabota*) during the decades in which many of the people I met had come of age, the 1960s and 1970s. As we will see, this also happened to be a time in which Soviet modes of mobilization went through important changes. During the Khrushchev thaw, movements for communist morality and neighborhood policing relied on generating a degree of popular enthusiasm, in which

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[19] This secular background is true of many contemporary religious activists throughout the former Soviet Union, even in areas such as Ukraine where statistical indicators for religious belief remained higher throughout the decades of Soviet rule, but where remaining religious communities were depleted through emigration during the 1980s; see Wanner 2007.

anti-religious campaigns played a role (see chapter 3). Leonid Brezhnev succeeded Nikita Khrushchev in 1964 and retreated from the populist elements of his predecessor's governing style (Breslauer 1982). Cultural workers were still required to pay rhetorical homage to constant change and demonstrate the way in which their work helped transform society toward communism, but had to avoid doing anything that might upset the social stability on which the system relied. Nonetheless, many of my interlocutors remembered the Brezhnev years as a prosperous and relatively comfortable time, contrasting with the economic chaos that they saw as having been brought on by perestroika.

I was thus working with people who had lived through several waves of collective enthusiasm and disappointment. Contexts of teaching and learning, with their tension between a future-oriented movement toward changing students and a mandate to reproduce pre-existing knowledge and norms, seemed to offer a promising prism through which to see the fragile and sometimes ironic links between different periods in people's lives.

Another decision I made was to focus on the Mari republic as a region, rather than singling out a particular religious or ethnic group within it. For reasons I will explain further in chapter 1, the Volga region has long been an area that inspired observers to see parallels and similarities across community boundaries. The long-standing coexistence of religious groups offered an opportunity to look at religious diversity from a different angle than in studies of conversion, conflict, or migration. I later learned that religion's suspected role in cementing and maintaining community boundaries was also a major focus of Soviet atheist critique, making an approach that acknowledged the religious

diversity of the region all the more appropriate. My hope is that by focusing

simultaneously on the religions with a long historical presence in the area and the

relatively recently established Protestant communities, my work can offer a corrective to

studies of religion in post-Soviet Russia that, under the heading of "religious pluralism"

or "religious freedom", discuss only the treatment of Protestant communities in Russia

(Bourdeaux 1995; Elliott and Corrado 1999; Uzzell 1997). There is abundant historical

and ethnographic literature to demonstrate that Russian and Soviet experience with

religious plurality does not start with the arrival of Protestants (Balzer 1999, 2005;

Breyfogle 2005; Crews 2006; Devlet 1991; Engelstein 1999; Goluboff 2003; Kappeler

1982, 1992; Khalid 2007; Nathans 2002; Northrop 2004; Panchenko 2004; Werth 2002).

By including Protestantism as merely one facet in the diversity of religious life, I hope to

show both its strangeness within regional understandings of religion and its special

affinities with Soviet secularity.

Researching controversial convictions

In practice, my decision to look at didactic practices among a range of religious groups

met with some difficulties and limitations. During two months of preliminary fieldwork

in 2003, ten months between February 2005 and February 2006 (interrupted by two

months of archival research in Moscow in the fall, during which I paid occasional visits

to Marij El), and a month-long follow-up visit in September 2008, I participated in events

and came to know members and clergy of six different Christian denominations –

Russian Orthodox (Moscow Patriarchate), Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Lutherans,

Pentecostals, and Charismatics – in addition to chimarij Pagans and Sunni Muslims. I

also interviewed a few scholars and former lecturers associated with the Knowledge Society who remained atheists, and a psychic healer who described himself as practicing Raja Yoga – "the most atheist kind of yoga" – and with whom some of the chimarij activists I met had taken classes.

The nature of my contacts with these groups varied greatly. The organizations differed in size and closeness of integration: there were tens of thousands of baptized Russian Orthodox Christians in the republic, but numbers would be much lower if one tried to count regular ritual observance. Muslims were also relatively numerous, but concentrated in the capital and areas in the east of the republic. Protestant congregations had typically between 100 and 250 well-documented members. The chimarij constituted a loose network without formal membership or generally recognized qualifications for the priesthood, and their ceremonial life was mainly concentrated in rural areas (map 2). Remaining convinced atheists were mainly isolated individuals, but I met two lecturers of the Knowledge Society who struggled to keep Joshkar-Ola's planetarium open until it was demolished in 2006 (see chapter 3).

I attended worship ceremonies in all religious groups, with my role ranging from being one among many ethnographic and journalistic observers tolerated at Mari sacrificial ceremonies, to being a communing participant in Lutheran services. During three visits to Friday prayer in the women's section of the mosque in Joshkar-Ola I was given a chair to sit on at the back of the room, distinguishing me from the Muslim women who sat on benches during the sermon, poised to get down onto the floor for prostrations during prayer. Two rural Orthodox priests asked me to leave the church during mass at the beginning of the liturgy of communion, while others let me stay as a participant in
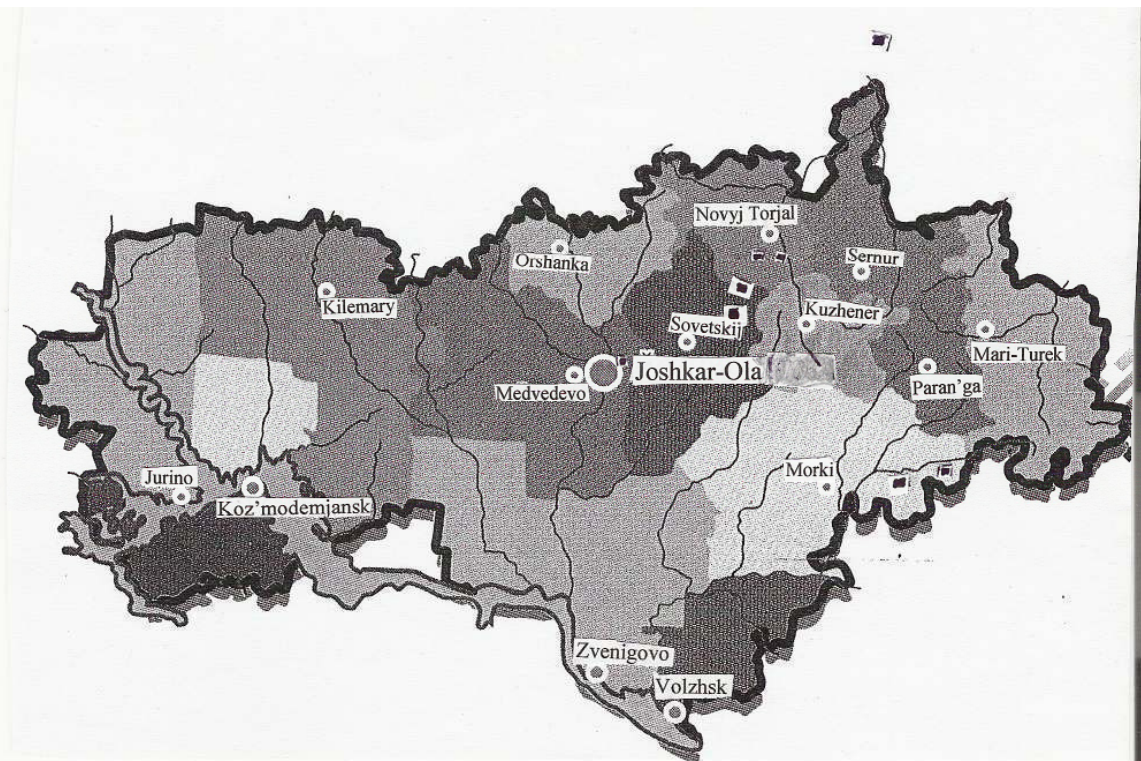
Map 2: The Republic of Marij El at the time of my fieldwork. In addition to the capital, Joshkar-Ola, district centers are labeled with names. Unlabeled black squares indicate villages where I visited chimarij ceremonies, and/or interviewed their organizers.

prayer but not in communion. In the Charismatic congregation I was offered communion but declined to take it, and was limited in my participation in worship by my inability to speak in tongues.

Everywhere, the question that greeted me in response to my declared interest in post-Soviet religious life was "and what is your faith?" (*a u vas kakaja vera?*). My response, that I was a Lutheran from Germany, fit reassuringly into widespread ideas of a correspondence between religion and ethnicity. Nonetheless, just as I positioned myself in different degrees of peripheral participation, my interlocutors also had different interpretations of what I was doing. Two Muslim women hoped I was seeking to convert to Islam, some Orthodox friends persistently addressed me as Sophia (which Sonja is short for in Russian) as if to soften my heart toward the saint I ought to be venerating,

and chimarij expected me to contribute to the sacrifice with coins and to participate in eating the sacrificial food at the end of the ceremony regardless of my religious affiliation. Protestants saw me as a fellow Christian who perhaps came to their churches mainly to worship and whose real research lay elsewhere, though members of evangelical denominations that practiced adult baptism were mildly shocked when they learned I had been baptized as an infant. Everywhere there were dress and gestural codes to observe. I conformed to expected female attire – skirt and headscarf – among the chimarij, Orthodox and Muslims, and generally took to wearing long skirts on days where I thought there might be an occasion to enter a house of worship. Seeing me always in long skirts, members of the Charismatic church – who derided modest female attire as an attempt to sanctify oneself through externalities – commented that Lutherans must be very conservative.

Moving beyond worship settings, I had very different opportunities for further formal and informal interactions, depending on the authority structures of each denomination, the kinds of didactic activities offered in each, and the level of trust in a western researcher. While I recorded interviews with clergy and lay leaders (people who were either employed or volunteered for their church) among the Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Muslims, Orthodox lay people were generally only willing to talk to me at the request of their parish priest. My initial attempts at conversations with lay workers in Orthodox churches were always blocked by saying I should talk to one of the *batjushki* (priests). After having obtained an audience with the Archbishop of Marij El and receiving his blessing to study educational work in the diocese, I was able to sit in on classes for Sisters of Mercy, where women were trained in

basic health care and Orthodox catechism, and met members of diocesan committees

involved in educational and missionary work. Through acquaintances, I also came to

know icon painters, schoolteachers with Russian-Orthodox commitments, and the

saleswoman at a church bookstore. Educational activities in the Orthodox church were far

more distinctly separated from worship than among Protestants, but laypeople engaged in

the former still deferred to the authority of clergy and were often uncomfortable with

giving a formal, recorded interview.

Among the chimarij, my contacts came through informal acquaintances as well as

two organizations of the urban intelligentsia, the cultural-political movement Mari

Ushem (Mari Union) and the Mari Cultural Center (Mari Tuvyr Rüder), which was closer

to the current government of the republic.[20] Both organizations recognized a man named

Aleksandr Tanygin as the high priest of the republic, a position created post-1991 to

provide for a counterpart to the Orthodox archbishop and Islamic mufti, able to represent

the religion at government functions. Always diplomatic in his relationships with the

republic's government, Tanygin used the Cultural Center, rather than the membership

network of Mari Ushem, to coordinate the activities of priests in the districts. During my

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[20] During the time of my stay, cultural and educational institutions in Marij El were clearly under pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to the administration of President Leonid Markelov, who had been elected in 2000 and reelected in 2004 with obvious backing from Moscow. In May 2005, the European Parliament followed the recommendations of Estonian and Hungarian members and passed a resolution condemning Russia's treatment of Finno-Ugric minorities, citing the recent uninvestigated beating of a Mari Ushem leader and cuts in funding for Mari-language education and media in Marij El as instances of ethnic discrimination. The resolution added fuel to internal divisions among political and cultural elites in the republic, and some suspicion on the part of government administrators as to the purpose of my presence in the republic. I did hear complaints from teachers that funding for Mari programs had decreased under the present presidential administration, something that these teachers attributed to the fact that the current president was an ethnic Russian with few prior ties to the republic. Restrictions on local media, however, seemed to affect Russian-language periodicals as much as Mari-language ones, and instances of physical attack on public critics of local governments occur, unfortunately, also in Russian republics governed by members of the titular nationality. The January 2006 issue of Russia's leading ethnological journal *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* features a discussion criticizing the European Parliament for ethnicizing struggles over democracy in Russia's regions (Cheshko 2006).

stay in 2005/06 I attended eight sacrificial ceremonies in sacred groves in different parts of the republic and at a site in neighboring Kirov region, some of which I learned about through the Cultural Center, others from local residents or rural schoolteachers whom I had met while teaching German during my first year in the republic.

In an effort to both respect local sensibilities and protect my commitment not to make myself into a spokesperson for any of the mutually conflicting projects of my interlocutors, I depart somewhat from conventions of naming customary in North American social sciences. Having met many people in Russia who found the idea of assigning pseudonyms deceitful and suspect, I decided not to use pseudonyms in this study. Although I believe that quite a few of my interlocutors would have given me permission to use their real names if I had asked for it, I decided not to do that either. I was not sure if I always wanted to fulfill the implicit expectation of what my final text would look like. What I finally decided to do was this: I use the real names of people who are publicly known figures whose published work I am also quoting. Everyone else is referred to by a description of the role in which I encountered them, e.g. "the dormitory supervisor," "the Baptist minister," "the lecturer," etc. Since I was working with very recent archival documents, here, too, I only mention the names of people who were acting in official capacities for which they are still remembered today, while anonymizing more coincidental participants.

Embracing the necessarily patchy perspective of research across time periods and ideological commitments, my aim was to come up with mosaics of knowledge that did not quite match those of any of my interlocutors. Rather than adhering to a distinction between "our" social concepts, which we have to criticize, and "theirs," toward which we

have to be sympathetic, the best justification for formalized social scientific research is perhaps that it produces knowledge that never quite matches what members of any society know through self-reflection, making it both much less and a little more than such self-knowledge.

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into four parts. The chapters of part I, "Affinities," introduce the transformation of local social imaginaries through didactic intervention as an aspect of atheist efforts with lasting consequences. Chapter 1 does so by situating atheist concerns within a longer history of religious landscapes in the region from imperial to post-Soviet times; chapter 2 by introducing the concept of didactic method as a site of elective affinities between atheist attempts to transform this social landscape and the work of post-Soviet religious activists.

Chapter 2 argues that there is a link between a reliance on didactic method and a particular structure of social mobilization, and this link is elaborated in part II, "Methodologies." Examples range from the circulation of textual prompts in Soviet and Protestant didacticism (chapter 3), chimarij attempts to construct didactic networks addressing both would-be priests and cultural workers through merging ritual and didactic performance (chapter 4), and the creation and circulation of hand-made visual aids as a recruitment tool (chapter 5). Throughout, I argue that we attend to the mobilizing power of networks of continuous education, a power often overlooked both in studies of late Soviet culture and in studies of educational settings that emphasize their tendencies to reproduce existing social stratification.

From elective affinities between social networks constructed through didactic practices, part III, "Suspicions," moves on to the place of didacticism in judgments about the divide between secular and religious spheres. Chapter 6 continues the theme of visual images introduced in chapter 5, but looks at controversies about the use of various kinds of material and mental images in different religious and anti-religious traditions. Chapter 7 discusses the category of spirituality in Russian Orthodox and Pentecostal/Charismatic liturgical theologies, and the very different relationships to secular spectacle in spiritual worship stands in each denomination. Both chapters aim to illuminate theologically motivated controversies over what counts as secular cultural form and how to interact with it – and aspect of secularization often overlooked in studies of contemporary religiosity.

In Part IV, "Rhythms," chapter 8 returns to issues of secularity and theologization raised in this introduction, by discussing the intersecting rhythms of secular and religious orientations in the lives of individuals and in the twentieth-century history of the Mari republic. Sometimes, postsecularity can come with old age. In the conclusion, I return to a question that haunts the atheist and religious activists in this study as much as it haunted Weber and the characters of Goethe's novel: on what grounds to interpret qualitative resemblances and transformations, and what significance to assign to them.

In looking at Soviet atheism and post-Soviet religion through the lens of didactic practices, I may seem to impose a secular paradigm on religious life. Certainly my focus has led me to concentrate on practices that were central to the activities of the Knowledge Society and reform-oriented religious groups, while more marginal in the life of other religious denominations. My aim is to identify post-secular pressures toward and

obstacles against adopting didactic methods to mobilize religious publics, in order to insist on their strangeness, not on their naturalness. Events designed to catch public attention by virtue of being interesting, entertaining, and useful are a commonplace in the experience of most North American readers. What may be most striking about the mutual atheist-religious critiques described in this dissertation is that all sides agree that there are limits to what is permissible in projects of persuasively transforming other people's lives.

PART I

AFFINITIES

Chapter 1

Religion and community in the Mari country

Situated near the border between Europe and Asia, on territories that were incorporated into the pre-modern Muscovite state, but were still subject to special administrative policies during the era of Russia's modern imperial expansion, and divided between the areas of competence of Slavic, Finno-Ugric, and Turkic studies, Russia's Middle Volga region lies on the periphery of various fields of historical and cultural inquiry. For this reason perhaps, it has seldom attracted the attention of an international scholarly community beyond those with specific area or linguistic interests. When it did attract such attention, it was often as a place where diverse populations have lived in close proximity over prolonged periods of time, making community boundaries murky and providing material for those interested in theorizing the transformative role of spatial proximity.

When Nikolaj Trubetskoj and Roman Jakobson elaborated their concept of language alliance (Russian *jazykovoj sojuz*, German *Sprachbund*, intended as a challenge to genealogical models of relationships between languages), one of their prime examples were the phonological affinities between the Slavic, Turkic and Finno-Ugric languages of

Eurasia, observable in the Middle Volga basin (Jakobson 1931). In historical scholarship, Andreas Kappeler, one of the pioneers of the recent interest in tsarist Russia as a multi-ethnic empire, started along this path with a study of the Middle Volga peoples as "Russia's first nationalities" (Kappeler 1982), and in recent years a number of studies of the cultural politics of the multi-ethnic Russian empire have either wholly or partially focused on this region (Crews 2006; Geraci 2001; Kappeler 1992; Werth 2002). The religious life of the region has also been described as characterized by mutual borrowings of concepts, names for supernatural beings, and devotional practices. Such affinities are sometimes analyzed as layers of syncretism between indigenous religions, Islam, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Akhmet'janov 1981, 1989; Frank 1988; Popov 2005; Sebeok and Ingemann 1956: 313-319; Suleymanova 1996).

In all of these studies, the Middle Volga region appears as rife with the kind of processes which traditional cultural, linguistic and historical analysis has often found difficult to recognize and describe: blurred boundaries of ethnic, linguistic and religious difference, trajectories of development that are better described as networks of acquired affinities rather than genealogical trees, uncertain and shifting lines of domination and allegiance (Sériot 1999). As we will see in this chapter, ethnographers, historians, and linguists were not the only ones to find this state of affairs challenging. Not unlike their counterparts in the overseas colonies of western European imperial powers, Soviet administrators struggled to make sense of the diversity of the region (Hirsch 2005; T. Martin 2001). Those administrators whose task was to combat religion also tended to focus their critique on the complex connections between religious adherence and other identifiable markers of communal boundaries. At the same time, the more conscientious

among them recognized the difficulty of distinguishing "harmful" religion from the ethnic cultural life that Soviet officials had a mandate to foster and develop.

This chapter is concerned with what we can learn from their difficulties about the stakes and long-term consequences of atheist propaganda. I argue that one of the central objections against religion from the point of view of party officials was its alleged role in constructing and upholding boundaries against the envisioned solidarity of socialist society. Such boundaries could be social distinctions of ethnicity, gender, or residence, or reservations against the scientific epistemology that was supposed to guarantee universality. To use a term from Charles Taylor, atheists contrasted their own open and universalistic "social imaginary" (Taylor 2004, 2007: 159-211) to the bounded and fragmented one allegedly associated with religion.

As we will see, something about the core assumption of atheist critics – that there was a correspondence between religion and community – resonated with local social imaginaries. However, the scale of community encompassed by religious practice was not fixed, but expanded and contracted according to occasion and historical circumstance. What is more, recognized parallel practices and affinities across religious communities meant that religion could be a bridge between communities as much as a divider. Socially, religion could play a comparable role to that of the folkloric performances that were fostered during the Soviet era, and in which the ethnic groups of the Volga region were presented as having distinctive, but comparable songs, music, and costumes. One of the more ironic effects of Soviet secularizing attempts, I argue in the final part of the chapter, is that assumptions about links between ethnic groups and religious identity have become common sense in post-Soviet Marij El. But to focus only on this irony would

mean to miss the main innovation of Soviet social imaginaries lay in the attempt to orient

people's social interactions exclusively toward other humans – the aim was to turn the

energy expended in contacts with otherworldly interlocutors toward the development of

human society, and to do away with distinctions between people introduced by various

degrees of closeness to a variety of gods and spirits. With their understanding of religion

as at once too deeply entrenched in social life and dangerously at odds with it, atheist

activists remind us that problems of neighborly relations in a multi-religious region have

implications beyond the realm of mere sociology.

Religion and difference in contemporary Marij El

During my stays in Marij El between 2000 and 2008, the members of religious groups I

was in contact with were all aware of living in an environment of many religious and

non-religious commitments, but disagreed on the question of which of them legitimately

belonged in their republic. Of all the religious denominations active in the republic, only

Russian Orthodox Christianity, chimarij Paganism[1] and Islam were recognized by the

republic's government as "traditional religions" and represented on the Council of

Cooperation with Religious Associations convened by the president of Marij El.[2] Their

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[1] I use the term "Paganism" in spite of its negative connotations in English, because *jazychestvo* is the term most Mari I spoke to used when referring in Russian to their own religion. Some functionaries of Mari organisations spoke of 'traditional Mari religion' (*traditsionnaja Marijskaja religija*), a term which I find misleading, because parts of the Mari population have been Orthodox Christians for almost 500 years. Chimarij (pure Mari) is the term some people use to refer to unbaptized Mari. In Mari, adherents also use terms like toshto mari vera (the ancient Mari faith, the word for faith, vera, being a loanword from Russian dating at least to the nineteenth century), or the neologism mari jumyn jüla (Mari religion, literally „the ways/customs of the Mari god/gods"), a term created by the ethnographer Nikandr Popov and the High Priest of Marij El, Aleksandr Tanygin (Popov and Tanygin 2003), and promoted in circles supportive of Tanygin in his attempts to establish a republic-wide Pagan organization.

[2] Between 2001 and 2005, there was a position of presidential advisor for religious affairs in Marij El, so that the Council of Cooperation with Religious Organizations was directly subordinate to the presidential administration. In spring 2005 I learned that this position had been eliminated and that an official of the department of interethnic relations within the Ministry of Culture, Print, and Interethnic Relations was now

highest regional dignitaries, the Russian Orthodox archbishop, the Pagan high priest and the Sunni mufti of Marij El, were guests of honor at state events, always seated next to each other, whether on the tribune in front of the government building for the Victory Day Parade on May 9, or in the auditorium for special sessions of parliament.

The Protestant churches I visited (Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Seventh Day Adventists) were not represented on this council, and neither were other religious organizations active in the republic such as Old Believers, Jews, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Neoapostolics, and others. However, organizations representing these denominations had all received state registration as religious organizations, some of them at the cost of joining in a nationwide association or changing their name to identify with a federally recognized denomination after a new federal law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations made registration requirements more stringent in 1997. Although the main intention of the law seems to have been to restrict the activities of foreign missionaries in Russia, the only religious group that was denied registration in Marij El was the Pagan association Oshmarij-Chimarij, on the grounds that it was unable to prove institutionalized existence in the republic for the required fifteen years.[3] Chimarij ceremonies were nonetheless held without hindrance, while Protestant

responsible for convening the council. The federal presidential administration, a number of regions and republics within the Russian Federation, as well as governments of large cities have similar consultative bodies, which vary in name, composition, and institutional affiliation (see Filatov 2002: 71; Mitrokhin 2004: 240).

[3] The law's much-criticized preamble singles out Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism "and other religions" as "an integral part of the historical patrimony of the peoples of Russia." Of more practical consequence is a distinction made in the body of the text between religious *groups* and religious *organizations*. Only the latter have the right to be a legal person, own property, maintain educational institutions and issue invitations to foreign nationals for teaching or missionary work. In order to register as a religious organization, a religious group of at least ten citizens has to demonstrate that it has either existed locally for at least fifteen years, or is part of a centralized, Russia-wide organization. The name of the religious organization has to clearly designate its denomination, which forced name changes on some groups that simply referred to themselves as "Christian" or "evangelical Christian" before. On the history

congregations, though also able to meet and worship, reported various forms of discrimination, such as being passed over by the local mass media with silence, having difficulty renting auditorium space for worship or evangelizing, and encountering distrust and often refusal when trying to initiate evangelizing programs in schools, orphanages, hospitals, prisons, army barracks or other public institutions.

As I explained in the introduction, the three traditional religions recognized by the government ideally correspond to the three major ethnic groups of the republic – Russians, Maris, and Tatars. An official concerned with religious affairs within the presidential administration told me that after initial interest in the religious choices offered by post-Soviet freedom, people in the republic were beginning to understand that the best place for them was "the traditional religion of their people." This official, who identified as a Mari Pagan, thought that (Orthodox) churches were needed in Marij El "for Russians." She quoted the Russian proverb "You don't go to a strange monastery with your own rule,"[4] to say that Protestant missionaries deserved respect for their faith, but should not propagate it among people to whom it was historically alien. At the same time, she emphasized the tradition of peace and toleration among representatives of the three traditional religions in the region, exemplified by the fact that one of the main supporters of the construction of a new Orthodox church in a nearby district center was a Tatar Muslim, the head of the district administration.[5]

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of this law and for examples of the largely critical Western reaction to it, see Elliott and Corrado 1999; Gunn 1999; Shterin and Richardson 1998.

[4] *V chuzhoj monastyr' so svoim ustavom ne khodjat.* This proverb is roughly equivalent to the English "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" and can be used to make a point about proper behavior in unfamiliar settings without any connection to religion. But given the religious metaphor used in the proverb, it is not surprising that it often came up in my conversations with people about interactions between people of different faiths.

[5] Interview notes, 26 June 2003. Local and regional governments and rural collective enterprises supporting the construction of houses of worship (both financially and through donations of labor, land, and building

Such assumptions about a link between religion and ethnicity ("nationality" in Soviet and post-Soviet parlance) are not limited to the Volga region. On the level of the Russian Federation, several religious confessions use census data on ethnic self-identification as a basis for estimates of the numbers of their adherents, in part because the Russian census does not include questions on religious affiliation. Thus, the Russian Orthodox Church claims all Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians living in the Russian Federation as Orthodox, Buddhists claim all Kalmyks and Burjats, Lutherans all Finns and Germans. Likewise, people who claim no personal religious belief will often name the confession associated with their ethnic group if asked about their religious affiliation (Filatov and Lunkin 2006).

Restrictive as it may seem, the idea that some religions are appropriate for certain ethnic groups has a certain built-in flexibility, as demonstrated by the position of the Lutheran church in Marij El. Its presence in the region is historically very recent – the Lutheran congregation of Joshkar-Ola was founded in 1993. The Finnish missionaries who established it nonetheless present it as a form of Christianity that is more readily comprehensible to people of Finno-Ugric descent than Russian Orthodoxy. When a fledgling Lutheran congregation proposed to build a church in the Mari village of Ljupersola in Sovetskij district in the summer of 2005, assumptions about a connection between religion and community were used as arguments by all sides of the debate. The speeches made at a village council meeting convened by district-level officials to discuss

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materials) are a common occurrence in the Russian Federation of the 1990s and 2000s. The Church of Christ the Savior in Moscow and Qol Sharif Mosque in Kazan' are among the best known examples, but support from secular authorities can be even more crucial in small towns and rural areas where commercial sponsors are hard to find (see Balzer 2005: 58; Humphrey 1998: 487; Rogers 2004: 315-320). As Nikolaj Mitrokhin (2004: 255-256) notes, for local politicians the financing of such building projects is a way to demonstrate concern for the needs of the electorate, support for historical and cultural heritage, and involvement in the moral improvement of society.

the construction plans show that this connection operates on a variety of levels, eluding a simple equation of religious adherence and ethnicity.

A Mari-language Lutheran congregation of approximately 50 members had registered as a religious organization in Sovetskij district in the spring of 2005. The members, resident in Ljupersola or in neighboring villages of the same collective farm, had converted through the efforts of a Mari writer and deacon of the Lutheran congregation in Joshkar-Ola, who had been paying weekly visits to the village for several years, conducting services and catechism classes. After completing registration, the congregation had acquired a plot of land in the village and had secured promises from Finnish volunteers to come and help build a wooden church there. Towards the end of a lengthy application process for a building permit, the district administration convened a village council meeting in late August. Two Orthodox priests had been invited, but none of the Lutheran clergy, who were only present because they had heard about the meeting from a contact in the village administration.[6] Addressing the council in Russian, the head of the district administration (a Mari) expressed a range of concerns:

> In connection with this question of construction, it seems to me that today, probably, the fate of your village is being decided, and of your population, of our Mari population most of all. I briefly made myself familiar with the beginning of this movement, this Lutheran [movement], yes? The recruitment of people (*vovlechenie ljudej*). They started very small. They helped with clothing, yes, somewhere perhaps with food provisions, somewhere still other things. Here, it seems to me, our poverty was played on. Unfortunately, this is how it is today, there's no denying it. And, after all, this isn't done just like that, I ask that all understand that. Behind all this hides some sort of objective, right? Let's say,

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[6] Although I visited the Lutheran congregation in Ljupersola on several occasions in 2005, I was not present at this council meeting. My account of it is based on the recollections of one of the Lutheran clergy present and a tape with recordings of the speeches provided by him. Although a building permit was finally awarded (see below), the status of the building remained in flux at the time of my last visit in 2008. As I was afraid that a foreign researcher asking questions would be seen as exerting pressure one way or the other, I made no attempt to contact the head of the district administration or any of the village officials to hear the story from their perspective.

these Finns help today to do this, not just like that (*ne prosto tak*). It seems to me, let them do this work in their own country, everything is permitted over there, they live in prosperity there, let them do their work there (*pust' oni zanimajutsja tam*). We have here the Orthodox Church, that is, religion, and also our traditional religion, the Pagan religion, and I think that this is exactly the religion which, probably, we have and should have (*u nas ona est' i dolzhna byt'*). This movement, it has probably a goal, it seems to me, a bad one. To destroy the foundation of Russia, as a whole. Concretely it seems to me that in Marij El they are doing this. After all, going over to a different faith (*vera*), it seems to me that grown-up people who went over to a different faith, after all, probably if a person accepted a faith once, probably in betraying this faith, switching to another, in the interest of some goal, it seems to me that this is already not the faith to which he is, let's say, faithful (*veren*). That is, he can switch again, when a better offer comes along, why not switch again. That is, I think that every person, if he is born in some faith or other, well, he should be convinced of this faith (*ubezhden dolzhen byt' v etoj vere*). For this reason, when I received the petition (*obrashchenie*), esteemed inhabitants, you know, I was against it right away. And, since this has been going here already for some years, it seems, it must be about eight years, that is that [they/you] started doing these things (*nachali zanimat'sja etimi delami*), of course some time was wasted. After all, even if let's say the association (*obshchestvo*) exists here now, which, well, believes – we should not blame the person, let's say he likes it, and he doesn't understand maybe all of this, well, this person can't even be buried in our graveyard, do you understand? Simply stated, this is already a different faith, and they must have a different graveyard and all the rest. For this reason I am simply asking all of you to make the right decision. We cannot command, insist on something, each one must approach this matter consciously.

In this speech, themes from my interview with the republic-level official reappear: the immorality of leaving the faith of one's birth, the sufficiency of those confessions that have traditionally been practiced in Marij El, and the idea that foreigners should practice their religion at home rather than seeking to spread it in Russia. But the district head dwells more forcefully on the threat to social unity presented by religious conversion, evoking both the national level (the Finns seeking to destroy "the foundation of Russia") and the minutiae of village life (the graveyard). Because it reveals much about the links between religion and community which endow political rhetoric about religion with

emotional force, the claim that a Lutheran convert would forfeit the right to be buried in the village graveyard is worth dwelling on for a moment.

According to the Lutheran deacon, the district head had made the same statement before on local radio, and it had caused great fear among some of the members of the congregation, many of whom were elderly, so that death and burial were part of their not-so-remotely expected future. Whether made in good faith or as a deliberate misrepresentation, the threat had no backing in Russian law, which defines public graveyards as secular spaces to which no religious organization can grant or limit access. The statement was also only partially in line with local custom. Some villages in the republic did have separate graveyards exclusively for chimarij or Muslims. But in all the regular village graveyards I visited, Christian crosses stood interspersed with the wooden slabs or poles which marked chimarij graves and the metal cones with red stars on top which were popularized during the Soviet era as atheist burial markers. In villages with mixed Mari-Russian-Tatar populations there was often a corner reserved for Tatars, with headstones carved in Arabic script.

So most village graveyards seemed to incorporate a variety of faith traditions, and the statement that a new graveyard would be needed to accommodate the new congregation seemed exaggerated. In fact, later that same month I was present at the funeral of a Lutheran woman in the village graveyard. But the threat had a ring of possibility to it in terms of local practice. Separate chimarij and Muslim graveyards did exist in the district, and more importantly, the particular graveyard where a family buried its dead forged a tangible connection to other families, shaping communal obligations of care and commemoration. For example, whole villages went out on certain days in the

year for commemorative feasts on their relatives' graves (see chapter 8). Being buried in the village graveyard thus meant being part of an ongoing ritual connection between living and deceased villagers. Tatar families in Mari villages might not participate in these commemorations, but they were known to have their own cycles of commemorating the dead.[7] Lutheranism, as two villagers who spoke at the meeting pointed out, was largely unknown to the villagers, so they could not very well gauge what the consequences of its addition to the religious mix would be.

Given this background, and the fact that it is quite obvious from the district head's speech that he was not used to making public statements on religious matters,[8] it seems quite possible that his threat that there would have to be a separate Lutheran graveyard was not a deliberate lie. Rather, it may have been an attempt to impress on converts what great distance they were putting between themselves and the village community, and to frighten them out of persisting in this choice.

The warning about graveyards shows that village life in the Mari region can accommodate a degree of religious diversity, but this accommodation depends on each religious group's willingness to engage in a common horizon of mutually comprehensible practice. Rhetorical equations between religious adherence and community affiliation display the same mix of inclusivity with rigid exclusion. Speakers at the meeting were often quite vague in identifying legitimate religious faiths and scopes of communal

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[7] In fact, the woman in charge of teaching Quranic reading at the mosque in Joshkar-Ola, who was frequently invited to recite passages from the Quran at funerals, frequently complained to me how many Tatars were following what she took to be "Russian" customs of holding funeral and commemorative feasts on graves.

[8] Note his wavering between the more colloquial "faith" (*vera*) and the more official "religion" (*religija*), his frequent false starts and tautological word choices (to be "faithful" to one's "faith"), as well as the absence of stock official phrases from his speech, such as "freedom of religious confession" (*svoboda veroispovedanija*), which he replaces by saying that in Finland "everything is permitted" (*vse razresheno*).

affiliation, creating the appearance of agreement across a range of positions, while

casting the arrival of a religious group from Finland as something unheard of. Most

crucially, references to the ancestral faith of the village were usually undetermined about

what exactly that faith was. Another speaker from the district administration addressed

the assembly in Mari, saying:

> You have been living in this land for a long time, and before you, your fathers and
> grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers lived in this land. Every one of them had
> his own[9] place in this world, and in the other world everyone will also find his
> own place. Everyone had his own faith, everyone believed in one god. I ask you,
> in the future too, to maintain the connection with your own faith, the faith of your
> fathers, mothers, and grandfathers. You should not wander around here and there.

He was saddened, this speaker added, to hear that there were now "two faiths" among the

villagers, and quarrels between them. Out of the two religions mentioned by the district

head – Orthodox Christianity and chimarij Paganism – this speaker made one "faith of

your fathers, mothers, and grandfathers," speaking as if only the advent of Lutheranism

led to a multi-religious situation in the village. The district head had already made the

slide from mentioning two religions to speaking as if there was only one, the faith "we

have and should have."

This ambiguity has something to do with the specifics of this part of Marij El, an

area where the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church has been relatively strong since

the nineteenth century and chimarij ritual activity is weaker than in more remote parts of

the republic. In spite of this, Christianity has not been embraced as a part of regional Mari

identity, as was the case on the right bank of the Volga (Popov 1987; Werth 2002: 200-

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[9] All instances of "his own" in this quote are translations of Mari shkezhe, a third-person reflexive
possessive pronoun that is neutral in respect to the gender of the possessor, comparable to Russian svoj. I
thank Veronika Semënova for assisting me in translating the Mari passages on the tape.

222). Ljupersola has a sacred grove that was remembered and avoided as a past site of chimarij ceremonies, but it is also located a mere forty-five minutes by bus from the Russian Orthodox church of Semënovka, one of the few churches in the republic to remain open throughout the Soviet period (with a short interruption between 1940 and 1944). As one of the speakers at the village assembly pointed out, many of those who were now converting to Lutheranism had originally been baptized there. The monastery of Ezhovo, which had been closed during the Soviet era, but whose healing spring had remained a pilgrimage site, was even closer. A young woman from one of the villages belonging to the same collective farm, whom I met by chance in Joshkar-Ola, told me that people from that cluster of villages had not gone to pray in the sacred grove within her memory. The only ritual activity she knew of was some residents going to church in Semënovka.

By maintaining ambiguity about "the ancestral faith of the village," speakers de-emphasized differences between Orthodox or chimarij sympathies and stressed the outsider status of Lutheranism. The district head seemed to give preference to Paganism by calling it "our traditional religion" and another speaker from outside the village spoke of the religion of their ancestors as toshto mari jumyn jüla, "the old Mari God-customs," using the neologism for "religion" favored by High Priest Tanygin and other activists working for a republic-wide chimarij revival. A villager, making the same case for religious unity, explicitly named Orthodox Christianity as the religion of the village. In his speech, a second level of ambiguity was also apparent: an ambiguity whether the community threatened by the Lutheran presence was the village or the nation.

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Switching back and forth between Russian and Mari, this villager started out on the national level: "*V tom-to i delo, chto my v Rossii* ilena, *a oni zhivut v Finljandii.* Tyge *prosto zhe* iktezhe ushanen ona kert. Da lijyn kertesh, *eto prosto politika* gyna." ("The thing is, we live in Russia, and they live in Finland. So simply for this reason we cannot unite. And it may be that this is just simply politics.") Finally switching into pure Russian, the man described a "global plan" behind the destruction of religious unity, and finally referred to a place "among us here" (*u nas zdes'*) whose reference was open – it could have been the village, it could have been the Russian Federation:

> Tide *global'nyj plan, chtoby* Rossijym *razrushit'* pytarash. […] *Ved' u nikh tam nichego netu, eto u nas v Rossii tak, Sibir' eshche bogataja u nas, neft', gaz, vse, vse est', u nikh netu vot, i idet bor'ba za eto, eta problema mirovaja problema, ne nasha! Nas tuda prosto podtalkivajut.Vot tak, tovarishchi. Tak chto, u nas, my odna vera, da, nu eto pravoslavie, znachit, dolzhny byt' vsegda. Znachit, otdelis', i dolzhen verit' etoj veroj. U nas zdes' dve very ne dolzhno byt' i ne mozhet byt'.*

> This is a global plan to destroy Russia completely.[10] […] After all they don't have anything over there, it is here in Russia, our Siberia is still wealthy, oil, gas,

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[10] The Russian-Mari-Tatar translingualism of the region would be a dissertation topic in its own right, but one for people more qualified than I. Suffice it to say that the bilingual form *razrushit'* pytarash, here translated as "to destroy completely" is a linguistic example of the kinds of affinities between neighbors of different linguistic and religious groups which have drawn the attention of researchers to the Middle Volga. Russian, like many Slavic languages, has a system of verb aspect where most actions can be expressed by either a perfective or imperfective form of the verb. *Razrushit'* (to destroy) is the perfective form, corresponding to the imperfective *razrushat'*. The Finno-Ugric languages of the Volga region lack such an aspect system, as well as more general the mechanism for modifying verbs with prefixes and suffixes which is an important part of Russian morphology. Instead, they have a large number of verbs which can also function as modal verbs when combined with another verb, and such combinations take on some of the function of Russian prefixes and affixes. The Mari verb pytarash, meaning „to finish, to end, to eliminate", can be combined with the gerund of another verb to give the action the nuance of completeness and fulfillment. It is thus similar to the perfective aspect in Russian, but somewhat more emphatic because marking an action as perfective or imperfective is optional in Mari, not grammatically required as in Russian. For instance, tülash = to pay, tülen pytarash = to pay off completely, to finish a payment, to settle a debt. These kinds of grammatical affinities between languages of different origin in a common geographical area are among those features which the concept of "language alliance" was intended to capture. In the above quote, the speaker combines Russian and Mari ways of constructing a perfective aspect (the Russian verb with a perfective ending and the Mari modal verb), treating them as equivalent in a way reminiscent of what Roman Jakobson has called "the mutual and internalized equivalence of value between two languages within the linguistic thought of a single individual" (Jakobson and Pomorska 1983 [1980]: 86). In the way people in the region claim equivalences between some religions to the exclusion of others, "internalized equivalences" are joined by internalized incommensurabilities, as this chapter shows.

everything, everything is there, and they don't have it, and there is a struggle going on over it, this problem is a worldwide problem, not ours! We are just being pushed into it. This is how it is, comrades.[11] So that here, we are one faith, yes, well that is Orthodoxy, so this means that is what we should always be. This means, if you separate yourself off, you have to believe according to that faith. Here among us there must not be two faiths and cannot be.

The whole meeting was certainly an example of the kinds of micro-manipulations of democratic procedure which many of my interlocutors in Marij El routinely expected of politicians on all levels. But what is worth noting here is that all speakers colluded in maintaining ambiguities in some areas while making clear distinctions in others. The boundaries of Orthodoxy and Paganism are left unclear, while both stand in opposition to Lutheranism. Likewise, there is a sliding scale of loyalties between the village and the nation, Mari and Russian speech communities, whereas international aid is cast as definitely coming from hostile, greedy outsiders.

When I say that participants in the meeting colluded, I do not mean that they were intentionally covering up pre-existing religious differences. Rather, the term collusion is intended to draw attention to the rhetorically produced and potentially fragile nature of such unity of opinion. As linguistic anthropologists have understood the term, it means the collaboration of interlocutors in a specific social interaction, which they are "holding

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[11] The term "comrades" (Russian *tovarishchi*, Mari joltash-vlak, the latter literally meaning "friends") was commonly used as a form of address in secular public speeches in Marij El at the time of my fieldwork. It was not seen as an indicator of particular communist sympathies or nostalgia for the Soviet Union, although both Russian and non-Russian versions of the term were introduced into rural Russia as part of Soviet ideological discourse. The term did mark secular and official speech, as opposed to religious or more private forms of address, and I found that some speakers avoided it when they consciously wanted to put themselves in opposition to official political discourse. Christian dignitaries tended to use the phrase *brat'ja i sestry* ("brothers and sisters," with Orthodox clergy rendering it in the Slavonic pronunciation [s'estry] rather than the modern Russian [s'ostry]), whereas speakers with Mari nationalist inclinations often used rodo-tukym or rodo-vlak ("relatives") – terms which were also used by those Christian preachers working in the Mari language. I also heard rodo-tukym paired with poshkudo-vlak ("neigbors") in welcoming addresses, ceremonial exhortations and songs at village festivals. This pair of terms was used interchangeably with joltash-vlak in speeches made by officials at such occasions.

together for each other" through a "marriage of indefiniteness and precision in utterance

interpretation" (McDermott and Tylbor 1995: 219-220). Whereas participants in this

village council meeting colluded in constructing indisputable connections between faith

and local, district-level, and national solidarity, the situation might be different if, for

instance, the villagers were asked to contribute to the financing of a Russian Orthodox

Church in the district center.

Even at this meeting, the fragility of such collusions emerges. What we see here is

not a common front of Russian nationalism against the religious diversity coming from

abroad, as it is understood in some of the literature on problems of religious pluralism in

Russia (J. Anderson 1994; Bourdeaux 1995; Gunn 1999). Subtle differences between

speakers indicate the fissures in the links between religious commitments and scales of

communal integration. The contributions of the two Orthodox priests present at the

meeting, for instance, show the strategic importance that the ambiguity of the "one faith"

has for the church, but also its reluctance to participate in the collusion. One priest, rector

of the church of the nearby village of Orsha, spoke on the familiar nationalist theme of

Orthodoxy as a guarantor of Russian national unity going back to the conversion of the

Kievan Rus', whereas "divide and conquer" had always been the strategy of those

enemies God sent down upon Russia when this unity was being lost, starting with the

Tatars and ending with the German fascists. The other priest present served in the above-

mentioned church in Semënovka, which remained a religious center for the area even as

more village churches were opening. He showed his greater sense of diplomacy and most

likely greater theological education by avoiding any blunt accusations and offering a

more careful substantiation of Orthodoxy's claim to special status. Acknowledging that

state as a well as church were interested in a unified society, he presented Orthodoxy's

claim to providing such unity as based not so much in its constant support of the nation,

but in historical manifestations of God's will:

> Orthodoxy is one of the traditional faiths in the Mari country. At the time when Lutheranism first appeared in Russia, in the sixteenth century, thanks to Sweden, because of the influence of Swedes, Ivan the Terrible conquered Kazan', and Orthodoxy already spread here on Mari land. Among the special signs that the will of God was for the spread of Orthodoxy, we see in the history of the miracle-working icon of the Myrrh-bearing women in whose honor the monastery was built [at Ezhovo], and in the life of the great man, Saint Gurij of Kazan', who did much to enlighten the Maris with the light of the faith in Christ and to teach them learning, he did much for this, as the first bishop of Kazan'. And many more sacred things (*svjatinii*) which can be found on Mari land bear witness to the will of God, because God visited this land and helped people gain salvation in it (*pomogal v nej spasat'sja*).

In closing, the priest defined the choice facing the villagers as "spiritual," a choice

between belief systems rather than between allegiance or betrayal of a community. In this

way, he subtly departed from the opinions voiced by the political leaders, without

challenging the framework of consensus:

> Each of you has to make a choice for himself today. Because this story has been going on for a long time, and it will depend on the will of all of you together which way the spiritual life of this village will go. It is clear that we have no right to forbid anything or to undertake any measures. By law every registered religious organization has the right, using the official way, by filing documents, to build a church, to start a congregation, to carry out educational activities, this is all true. For this reason, in many ways it all depends what you yourselves want. How you yourselves want to live from now on. In spite of all apparent resemblance of Christian congregations, between them categorical differences exist. Therefore, in principle an Orthodox person cannot become Lutheran and a Lutheran who believes sincerely, I think, remains such until the end of life. This means there can be no mixing here, a human being cannot swing back and forth like a blade of grass. For this reason, each of you must make a spiritual choice.

By introducing the problem of "spiritual choice" (*dukhovnyj vybor*), the priest departs from the framework of debate in which religious observances – irregular, limited or unorthodox as they may be – were above all signs of trustworthiness and belonging. The agenda of the priests at this meeting only partially overlaps with that of the officials, for whom the dogmatic content of "our faith" can really be irrelevant as long as it is a basis for common village practices. Though nationally, the Orthodox Church is one of the principal proponents of the discourse on the primacy of "traditional religions," this rhetoric presents risks in regions where Orthodox missions are relatively recent and the Church competes with religions with longer or equal historical presence. Even the Lutherans, as we will see below, can deploy the discourse on the correspondence between religion and ethnicity against the Orthodox Church in Marij El. Still, both priests participated in the collusive production of unity by not openly questioning whether the faith of the villagers entails a commitment to the Orthodox Church.[12]

Before I examine the Lutheran participation in these debates, two things are worth retaining for understanding the ways in which inhabitants of post-Soviet Marij El think about religion and community. First, "our faith," "the faith of the grandfathers and grandmothers" was named as important by speakers with a very vague or fluid sense of any dogmatic or institutional content of this faith. This indicates that talk about the primacy of "traditional religions" is neither exclusively a product of either Moscow-

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[12] Such a policy of non-confrontation with regionally traditional religions has been reported by observers of contemporary Orthodox Church policy in other regions as well (Filatov 2002; Mitrokhin 2004: 451-455). When Patriarch Aleksij II visited Marij El in 1993 for the installation of the first bishop in Russia's youngest diocese, he stressed the Orthodox Church's intention not to oppose the "traditional Mari faith," but to live in "harmonious coexistence, mutual understanding" (*Marijskaia pravda,* July 27, 1993, p. 1).

based nationalism or the power claims of the Russian Orthodox Church, nor is there a Russia-wide consensus about what it means.

Second, this ambiguously defined religious solidarity is thought to exist with reference to social imaginaries operating at various scales. Some of these scales were among those which Soviet activists tried hard to eradicate for several decades: the village as a ritual community in which various categories of outsiders could never fully participate, for instance. The idea of a nation whose resources were coveted by western enemies, by contrast, was something that gained reality for rural residents during the Soviet period, as was the potentially dangerous, but also desirable global world of international ties. Soviet atheists thought that religion was essentially asocial, because it kept people from participating fully at the national as well as the international level. A closer examination of the Lutheran position shows that, although local understandings of religion were indeed tied closely to village and ethnic identities, they were also flexible enough to craft ties between these and international levels.

Historical narratives and social imaginaries

The Lutheran reaction to the strategies of exclusion described above was one of presenting their congregation as a part of Russia in general and Mari society in particular, while offering points of access to international ties. The decision of the village assembly – to reject the application for a building permit – was successfully challenged by the Lutheran deacon, who wrote a letter of protest to the district head listing the violations of Russian law on the part of the conveners: the meeting's agenda had not been announced in advance, the presence of a quorum of village residents had not been ascertained, the

vote had been by open ballot without giving people the option of first voting to keep it secret, the presence of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church violated the separation of church and state, and some statements made by the district head contradicted the federal law on freedom of conscience – for instance the assertion that converts would not be buried in the village graveyard and the claim that only some religions were appropriate for residents of the republic.[13]

The strategy of appealing to national law to establish a legal claim to being in Russia was successful. Without waiting to see if the Lutheran congregation would actually take the matter to court, the district head gave permission to construct a parsonage, not a church, on the plot of land. The Lutherans had been prepared for this outcome; indeed the Lutheran pastor had suggested it at the village council meeting. With help from the Finnish volunteers, they proceeded to build a wooden structure according to the original plan, simply omitting the steeple. By the time the building was consecrated three years later, in September of 2008, the congregation had received permission to name it a "prayer house" (*molitvennyj dom*), and the head of the village administration was present for the service of consecration. According to the catechist who led the congregation, the head of the administration had said "There is one God, but many organizations" (*Bog odin, organizatsii raznye*), indicating that he saw no reason to oppose one that had already found a following.[14]

This statement shows that over time, new groups can be included in collusive statements about the "oneness" of all religions. Lutheran missions in the Volga region have themselves consciously appealed to local ideas about connections between religion

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[13] This paraphrase of the letter is based on a draft copy provided to me by its author after he had sent the original.

and various levels of community, offering its converts the chance to bypass the national level and forge links between ethnic republics and a transnational Finno-Ugric world. Lutheranism was brought to Marij El and other Finno-Ugric republics in eastern Russia, such as Mordovia, Udmurtia, and Komi, by missions sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ingria. This church had its base in Russia, among the Finnish-speaking population of the area around St. Petersburg, but its work drew on heavy financial support from Finland (Shchipkov 1998; Filatov and Stepina 2002). The congregation in Joshkar-Ola was established by a Finnish pastor married to an Estonian woman. Though it proselytized among ethnic Russians as well as Mari, it made efforts to present itself as legitimately linked to Mari culture through incorporation of the Mari language in worship and distribution of Mari-language literature.

In portraying Lutheranism as a Finno-Ugric religion and Orthodox Christianity as a religion imposed through Russian imperialism, Lutherans, like the more politicized among the chimarij, took up the narrative of the forced conversion of the Mari to Russian Orthodoxy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which was standard fare of Soviet-era histories of the region (e.g. Korobov 1957). The same Lutheran deacon who established the congregation in Ljupersola also edited Sorta ("Candle"), a Mari-language Lutheran journal disseminated among Maris in Marij El and Bashkortostan. The issues often contained historical pieces, under headings such as Ertyme korno, "the way we came," about the oppressive actions of the tsarist government, including its promotion of the Russian Orthodox Church and taxation of chimarij ceremonies.

The deacon himself, when I interviewed him, remembered his feelings of dread when he was baptized at the age of five by an Orthodox priest visiting his village. He

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[14] Field notes, September 8, 2008.

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claimed that all Mari had this "fear of the priests," which he explained as a collective

memory of forced Christianization. This man had spent his childhood at a boarding

school for artistically gifted Mari children in Joshkar-Ola and in 1990 became the last

student from the Mari ASSR to graduate from the Higher Party School in Moscow before

it was closed.[15] So while I have no reason to doubt his memory of fear and distrust of

representatives of the Orthodox Church from childhood, there is also no doubt that during

his education he was exposed to many representations of the oppression of Maris by the

Church as an instrument of tsarist russification policies, such as the following excerpt

from a lecture prepared for the fiftieth anniversary of Mari autonomy in 1970:

> The tsarist government strove to suppress any manifestation of national culture and carried out a policy of russianization (*obrusenija*) of non-Russian nationalities. For this purpose christianity was forcibly implanted among the Mari population. Hundreds of churches were scattered in the region. Priests and *karty* worked their flock with great passion. For thousands of years the Mari people prayed to their pagan and christian gods, themselves not eating enough, not drinking enough, going around in rags, sacrificing their supplies, but not receiving any happiness or relief in exchange.[16]

This lecture places christianization, but also the practice of traditional Mari sacrifices, in

a context of Russian colonization and the oppression of the Maris which only ended with

the revolution of 1917. Expressing a similar equation of Russian Orthodoxy and Russian

colonialism, a Mari teacher from Bashkortostan interviewed in Sorta answers the

question why he converted to Lutheranism when there are two Russian Orthodox

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[15] Taped interview, 3 July 2003. This man was born in 1955, which would place his baptism in 1960. See also Luehrmann 2005: 47-48.

[16] GARME f. R-737, op. 2, d. 295, l. 3, lecture "The development of culture of the Mari ASSR over fifty years," I.V. Novoselova, October 1970.

Churches in his hometown by saying: "That's it, *Russian*," and pointing out that "our relatives the Finns and Estonians are for the most part Lutherans."[17]

Like this man quoted in Sorta, Mari converts I met often mentioned that they found the Lutheran church to be more respectful of Mari culture than the Orthodox Church and that they appreciated the opportunity to meet Finns and Estonians through it. At a seminar on missionary work conducted by the Lutheran church in Joshkar-Ola, one Mari from Bashkortostan recalled that when he started thinking about becoming a Christian, Russian Orthodoxy was out of the question for him. In his home town there had historically been two Orthodox church buildings, one for Russians and one "alien church" (*inorodcheskaja tserkov'*), "the same as for negroes."[18] It is easy to imagine that the reason he knew about this church and made the comparison to the treatment of "negroes" was that both topics were treated in Soviet-era history books.

Although I have shown above that Russian Orthodoxy and chimarij Paganism could enter into strategic alliances as "traditional religions," chimarij activists expressed similar views about the historically oppressive role of the Russian Orthodox Church. A lawyer in charge of registering a chimarij organization in a northeastern district of the republic, for instance, told me that his great-great-grandfather had been a chimarij priest who was baptized, but not at his own parish church, but in a far-off village, where he would go once a year to bring the required "tribute" (*prinoshenie*), so that the priest would leave them in peace.[19] Again, a family memory was clothed in language that

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[17] *Sorta,* no. 1, 2005, p. 9.
[18] Testimony during confirmation service, Church of the Holy Cross, Joshkar-Ola, June 26, 2005.
[19] Field notes, November 5, 2005. See also Uvarov 2000 for the view that "Lutheranism is close to Finno-Ugrians."

people would have learned in Soviet school, where the church was treated as an institution of feudalism.

At the same time, neither chimarij nor Lutherans simply saw their religious practices as tied to a unique local community. Using the Russian term *jazychestvo* ("Paganism"), members of Marij Ushem, a political organization dedicated to Mari cultural rights, were able to understand their own religion as part of worldwide practices. For instance, at a political meeting following one ceremony near the capital, I heard a proposal to organize an international conference on Paganism and invite the emperor of Japan, as head of a "Pagan" country, to chair it. At a planning meeting for another ceremony in June 2003, a member of Marij Ushem reported that he had seen on TV how thousands of Pagans gathered at Stonehenge in England for summer solstice, and proposed sending a delegation there the following year.[20]

Competing confessions thus agreed about a link between religion and community, but interpreted it by reference to social imaginaries assuming different scales of connections. Russian Orthodoxy's claim to special status within the Russian nation made it vulnerable to competition from religions that were less identified with the national level, but offered links between local and international frames of reference in a way described as "glocal" by Roland Robertson (1995). Robertson uses the term to draw attention to the way that globalization not only produces homogenization of space and time, but also heterogeneity, when some regions seem to be out of step with global developments. In economically marginalized areas of provincial Russia, where many people perceive themselves to be losers of Russia's attempts to integrate into a global economy, religious organizations can offer alternative ways of access to that global

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realm, contributing to the heterogeneity of available "global assemblages" (Ong and Collier 2005).

Other Protestant churches, while less obviously appealing to local identities, participated in this glocal framework in the sense that none would have considered themselves entirely foreign to Marij El or to Russia, but all maintained active ties abroad. For instance, small Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal congregations existed in the Mari Republic since at least the 1940s,[21] but the founder and head pastor of the currently largest Baptist church in Joshkar-Ola is a Moldovan who came to Russia in the early 1990s after having served in the Soviet Army and seeing how few believers there were in Russia.

The Charismatic "Christian Center" was established in 1993 by missionaries from Texas, and American citizens have served as pastors there throughout the 1990s, with interruptions caused by visa problems. At the time of my fieldwork, the pastor was a young Russian man who was born and raised in Joshkar-Ola and started attending the Christian Center as a teenager. He received his pastoral training and ordination during a stay at the Moscow branch of a Kievan church known as the Embassy of God. Since becoming pastor in Joshkar-Ola, he has been seeking to forge spiritual and administrative links with the Embassy and the teachings of its founder, the Nigerian preacher Sunday

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[20] Tape of aga pajrem celebration, Oaken Grove near Joshkar-Ola, June 5, 2005; field notes, June 23, 2003.
[21] GARF f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 156, ll. 29-31 (Report by commissioner of religious affairs Savel'ev to the first secretary of the City Committee of the CPSU and the chairman of the City Executive Committee, April 9, 1968). In this document, Savel'ev reports that both Baptists and Adventists appeared in Joshkar-Ola at the beginning of World War II (possibly among the workers of factories evacuated from western industrial centers?). One of his predecessors, the first commissioner of religious cults in the republic, who assumed office in July 1945, generally confirms that the communities in Joshkar-Ola were only a few years old at that time, but at one time mentions that a small Baptist community existed in the village of Jushkovo, 12 km from Joshkar-Ola, from 1920-25 (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 61, Report of commissioner for religious cults Nabatov to the Council for Religious Cults, July 14, 1947). The 1920s were a period of

Adelaja. One of the distinguishing features of the Embassy of God is a missionary strategy that differentiates people according to social and occupational rather than ethnic groups, while also promoting patriotism for the country in which a church is located – in the Moscow church, for instance, members of the band perform ecstatic dances with the Russian flag during worship, and the duty of a Christian to "raise up Russia" is a common theme in sermons both in Moscow and Joshkar-Ola.[22]

There is also a Pentecostal church in Joshkar-Ola whose pastor, a Mari, was converted by the same American missionary who founded the Christian Center. This pastor, with support from Finnish Pentecostals, travels to villages with evangelizing concerts in Mari, performing songs he translated or wrote himself, aiming to get his listeners away from the assumption that the Christian God is "something Russian."[23]

The Muslims, though recognized as traditional to the area, obviously felt under scrutiny for unwanted international connections: during three Friday sermons I visited scattered throughout the year, warnings against "Wahhabism" as heretical and foreign to Russia were always a theme of the preaching, and they also took up space in the Muslim community's journal, *Mag"lumat v Marij El*.[24]

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lively evangelizing activity by Baptists in the regions adjacent to the Mari ASSR – Nizhnij Novgorod and Vjatka Region – from where the faith may have spread (Jarygin 2004: 64).

[22] Adelaja himself is a naturalized Ukrainian citizen and was outspoken in his support of presidential candidate Viktor Jushchenko during Ukraine's "Orange Revolution" of November 2004. His theology incorporates teachings about how to participate in God's plan for contemporary Ukraine (see Adelaja 2005; Wanner 2007: 210-218).

[23] Taped interview, August 26, 2005. On differences between Pentecostals and Charismatics, see Introduction, footnote 14.

[24] I did not spend enough time with the Muslim community to form a grounded understanding of the politics behind these warnings, but they appeared to be related to the mufti's suspicion that some members of the mosque congregation wanted to replace him with another cleric. Marij El would not be the only part of Russia where the label Wahhabi is used by representatives of officially recognized Islamic institutions to discredit actual or potential rivals (see Kisriev 2004).

Even on the relatively rigid level of the ideologies of committed activists, the fit between religion and community left room for a variety of strategies of inclusion and exclusion at sliding geographical scales. The discussions around the Lutheran church in Ljupersola show that on the level of contemporary village practice, further flexibility is added when residents collusively subsume some religions under the common label of "ours." Historical materials show that neither the identification of religious practice with wavering communal boundaries nor the mutual accommodation between doctrinally ambiguous practices are new to the post-Soviet era. As the following sections will show, Soviet activists encountered a region where religious affiliation had long been an instrument of social division as well as social integration. Although their work aimed at eliminating what they saw as the isolating aspects of religion and replacing its integrating functions with those of secular culture, the ironic result was that the association of religious and ethnic identities has become far stronger in post-Soviet public representations than it ever was before. By contrast, the pull away from human community, which Soviet atheists denounced as the asocial effect of religion, is rarely explicitly addressed by post-Soviet administrators.

Communal and religious distinctions before the revolution

Soviet officials in the Volga region encountered a population where religious distinctions had mattered socially for centuries. When Mari chieftains were subjects of the Muslim Khans of Kazan', religious distinctions already served as dividing lines between different kinds of tax and labor obligations,[25] a practice which continued after Kazan' was

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[25] For instance, only Muslims formed part of the khanate's tax-collecting nobility, to the exclusion of nobles and chiefs of the non-Muslim subject peoples (Bakhtin 1998: 41). See also Kappeler 1992: 29-30.

conquered by Ivan IV in 1552. In Muscovy, unbaptized peasants paid tribute (*jasak*) in kind instead of taxes until the early eighteenth century (Kappeler 1982: 259). In the terminology used to designate the population of the Volga region, religious and linguistic criteria coexisted and overlapped. "Tatar" and "Muslim" could be synonymous, but "Tatar" could also include the Turkic-speaking, but non-Muslim Chuvash; "Cheremis," the label for Finno-Ugric speaking populations today known as Mari and Udmurt, sometimes included the Chuvash as fellow Pagans and peasants (Kappeler 1982: 84-86).

Pressure to convert to Christianity was exerted on Tatar and Mari elites in the early phases of conquest, and then again from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, when new property and inheritance laws favored Christians over "other-believers" (*inovertsy*). During the same period, land grants to monasteries strengthened the Russian presence and became the starting point for many of those sacred sites in the region referred to by the priest from Semënovka (Kappeler 1982: 168-176). Individual rulers in Moscow differed in the priority they accorded to Orthodox missions among the peasant population, but two intense missionary campaigns followed in the eighteenth century, combining coercion (destruction of sacred groves, taxes on sacrificial ceremonies, intimidation) with enticements (temporary freedom for converts from military service and taxation).[26] Of the Russian peasants who moved to the area, many

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[26] My impression that spreading Orthodoxy among the empire's population was not a goal which many Russian tsars pursued with great vigor or consistency is based mainly on Kappeler 1982 and 1992, Werth 2002, and the articles collected in Geraci and Khodarkovsky 2001. In the latter volume, Michael Khodarkovsky (2001) gives a general overview of policies towards non-Christians in Russia up to 1800, in which he stresses Orthodox conversion as a consistent state goal, sometimes, it seems to me, in contradiction which his own facts, which seem to speak far more of discontinuous campaigns, scarce allocation of resources, and by and large a preference for maintaining a peaceful and loyal population rather than promoting large-scale religious change.

were Old Believers, who continued to have a significant presence in the Mari Republic in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Werth 2002: 110-111; Jarygin 2004: 39-40).

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, those Maris who had not moved eastward to the Bashkir steppe were virtually all baptized, along with part of the Tatar population. These people became known as "newly baptized" (*novokreshchennye*), in contrast to the "old baptized" populations which had accepted Christianity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kappeler 1982: 278-279; Werth 2000, 2002: 22-27).

While conversion might have leveled some social distinctions, historians have noted a tendency among eighteenth and nineteenth-century Russian administrators and scholars to continue to treat non-Russian Christians as a group distinct from Russian peasants. The term *novokreshchennye* continued to be used, in the names of educational institutions, for instance, up to the late nineteenth century, by then designating people whose ancestors had been baptized Christians for 150 years. Also beginning in the late eighteenth century, the term *inorodtsy* (people of different kin, of alien descent) increasingly replaced *inovertsy* (people of different faith) as a designation for non-Russians. In the second half of the nineteenth century, training courses for non-Russian clergy at the Kazan' Theological Academy opened a way for the formation of indigenous Christian elites who went on to promote literacy in their native languages, which arguably contributed to the importance of ethnicity as a category of identification (Geraci 2001; Slezkine 1994a: 53; Werth 2000, 2002).

At the same time, religion continued to matter at other levels of community affiliation. Villages in the Volga region were mainly monolingual and monoreligious, although in some region Mari, Tatar and Russian villages were close neighbors. Each

village was an important ritual unit, both among unbaptized Maris, where the households of a village or clusters of villages carried out sacrifices in a common sacred grove (Popov 2005), and among Christian converts. Nineteenth-century Christian Mari exerted pressure on their fellow villagers to give up Pagan practices, which they saw as a threat to the purity of their own Christian life, while some Kräshens (Christian Tatars) who petitioned to re-register as Muslims argued that they could not be Christian in a Muslim village (Werth 2000: 500, 2002: 212).

This importance of the village as ritual community, which is still in evidence in the discussions about the Lutheran church in Ljupersola more than a century later, is part of a mode of religious coexistence that is not unique to the Volga region, but that is often overlooked in approaches to multi-religious areas as either "syncretistic" or home to religious identity politics (cf. Stewart and Shaw 1994). In this scheme of things, it is very hard to break out of conformity with the ritual life of one's village (however "syncretistic" that ritual life may seem by the standards of doctrinal orthodoxies – see Kefeli 1997; Luehrmann forthcoming), but it presents no problem that the nearest village just a few miles away accomplishes similar ritual aims in a different manner. During my fieldwork in Mari villages, for example, people would tell me that Maris and Russians commemorated the deceased on the third and ninth day, while Tatars observed the seventh day, or that people in their village visited the graveyard on St. Elijah's Day in August, while the neighboring village visited theirs the Saturday before Pentecost. Where a healing spring lay in between villages of different ethnic affiliation, it was understood that everyone visited the spring, but with different prayers to different gods (cf. Frank 1988 on parallel veneration of Muslim saints' graves).

The idea of different religious observances being appropriate to different communities was also articulated at a larger, ethno-linguistic scale. Starting in 1827 and reaching into the early 1830s, a revival among previously baptized Mari that led to a series of "world-wide prayer ceremonies" (mer kumaltysh, *mirovoe molenie*) for which Maris from hundreds of miles away gathered in prayer groves north of the Volga. According to missionary reports of the time, dreamers who initiated the revival argued that crop failures and other difficulties were occurring because Maris had stopped praying to their gods and "became Russian" (Werth 2002: 61), and that if all Maris were to abandon their ritual practices, they would die (Werth 2002: 30). In a court deposition of 1829, Maris accused of apostasy from Orthodox Christianity – a crime according to the laws of the Russian empire – defended themselves by arguing that God had created 77 languages and faiths, and that only the second coming of Christ would reveal which one was true (Popov 1996: 133).

The regional scale of these Mari revitalization movements shows that ritual communities could extend far beyond village boundaries for certain purposes, but still – in dialogue with legal discourse and administrative practices of the Russian empire – articulate a vision of religion as connected to the well-being of particular, bounded communities. Again, religion at once created boundaries and widened the scope of imaginable communities. Inheriting this mix of village and regional loyalties, Soviet activists focused on religion's boundary-making effects and declared them harmful to social progress. But they also had to contend with the fact that religious practice did not always conform to the boundaries which Soviet policies themselves were enforcing.

Soviet separations of religion and culture

While the link between religion and social identity had been a principle of governance in the Russian empire, it became a problem for Soviet activists. As a revolutionary state claiming to liberate the peoples that had been enslaved by the Russian empire, the Soviet Union was committed to fostering ethnic traditions rather than eradicating them (T. Martin 2001; Slezkine 1994b). But the simultaneous mandate to promote atheism meant that the religious elements of such traditions had to be identified and eliminated before the secular ethnic culture could be celebrated. This point has been made before (Hirsch 2005; Humphrey 1998; Sadomskaya 1990), but my aim in the remainder of this chapter is to show the visions of secular community and narratives about the harm of religion that emerged from atheist attempts to disentangle religion and culture in the Volga region. This narrative contrasted the social boundaries maintained by religion to the barrier-free secular public opened up by atheism. Actual observations about the religious life of the region simultaneously helped give shape to this narrative and challenged it, partly because some of the social agents that mattered in religious practice did not exist according to the exclusive humanism to which atheists were committed.

The difficulty of separating the harmful effects of religion from the desired secular community is shown by the attempts to introduce ethnic festivals through the Soviet period, designed to fulfill the mandate to develop progressive local cultures while combating religious influences. As part of a wave of measures of "demonstrative recognition" (T. Martin 2001: 183) of the folklore of peoples of the USSR in the 1920s, Joshkar peledysh pajrem (Festival of Red Flowers) was instituted among the Mari. First organized in 1920 in the district center of Sernur by students and instructors of the

teachers' college (see also Luehrmann 2005a: 49-50), it was timed to coincide with

semyk, a spring ritual commemorating the dead held during the seventh week after

Easter.

Throughout the 1920s, pledges were collected from village councils and collective

farms to forego semyk, Easter, or Pentecost, and instead to celebrate Joshkar peledysh

pajrem after spring sowing, with performances of song and dance and honors accorded to

exemplary workers (Solo'ev 1966: 9-13). In some villages, the festival was held in the

sacred grove, a gesture of substitution typical of Soviet anti-religious strategies – this was

the time when graveyards were being turned into parks in Joshkar-Ola as elsewhere in

Russia, and in large cities Christmas trees were being turned into New Year's trees

through a schedule of distribution and collection which made sure that the trees would

have to be discarded before Orthodox Christmas (Dragadze 1993; Petrone 2000: 93).[27]

The festival was also an occasion to introduce and showcase new versions of Mari

women's costume, omitting the shymaksh, soroka and other forms of elaborate headdress

for married women which were becoming targets of campaigns comparable to those

against veiling among Muslim women in Central Asia (cf. Massell 1974; Northrop

2004).[28] Since the embroidery on these headdresses was thought to have protective

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[27] Since the Russian Orthodox Church did not switch to the Gregorian calendar when it was instituted in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution, Orthodox Chrismas falls on January 7 according to the secular calendar, hence following after secular New Year's Day.

[28] See memories of activists involved in promoting the holiday in the 1920s in *Marijskaia pravda*, 20 June 1965, p. 3. Molotova 1992: 87 discusses changes in the Mari costume during that time. Different from the Central Asian *paranji* and *chachvon*, these headdresses did not cover a woman's face, but some of them were quite cumbersome and heavy, and, similar to peasant dress in many parts of Europe, they distinguished married from unmarried women, while there was no equivalent distinction in male costumes. They were attacked for being unhygienic and "diminishing a woman's dignity" (GARME f. R-118, op. 1, d. 23, l. 220 – Text of presentation by the chairman of the Mari organization of the League of the Militant Godless, Radajkin, at a seminar of Komsomol propagandists, December 20, 1940). The recommended replacement was the simple white or flowered headscarf, folded into triangular shape and tied either under the chin or behind the neck, which became part of the generic image of the Soviet *kolkhoznitsa* and is still widely worn by rural women today.

functions against the evil eye and dangerous spirits (J. Wichmann 1913), asking women to give them up when entering a sacred grove sent especially potent messages about the kinds of transgressions required for becoming a Soviet Mari.

Celebration of peledysh pajrem was discontinued in 1931, at the beginning of the Stalinist crackdown on "bourgeois nationalists" (Sanukov 2000: 36), and it is hard to ascertain from published sources how widespread it was up to then. As long as it lasted, the festival offered a demonstrative occasion to experience the kind of communal life that would satisfy the standards of Soviet secularity: an opening up of spaces that were formerly marked off by ritual precautions, and an elimination of social distinctions of gender, age, or marital status. A certain cultural distinctiveness was encouraged, in a framework of equivalence not unlike the one that had long prevailed in the Mari countryside: Maris had their festival, Tatars theirs; Maris, Russians, and Tatars all had their own music and forms of national dress. In the vision of the festival planners, the grove or the graveyard were to become a symbol of communal attachment to the beautiful Mari countryside and new practices of cultured leisure, places for people to meet without the interference of non-human forces. But post-war discussions about reviving ethnic festivals among the Mari and Tatars show that such reconfigurations were neither easily achieved nor easily verified.

As has been pointed out by many historians of Soviet religious policy, the Second World War brought fundamental changes to the relationship between the Soviet government and religious organizations (Pospielovsky 1984; Shkvarovskij 1995; Chumachenko 2002). After breaking their institutional power through the persecutions of the 1920s and 1930s, the government realized that it needed the moral support of

religious leaders in the war effort. Toward the end of the war, a specialized government bureaucracy dealing with religious affairs was put in place, reflecting a change in orientation from the immediate eradication of religious institutions to the realization that they would be part of Soviet life for the foreseeable future. The Council of Russian Orthodox Church Affairs (*Sovet po delam Russkoj pravoslavnoj tserkvi*) was created by Sovnarkom decree on October 7, 1943. In May 1944 it was complemented by the Council for Religious Cult Affairs (*Sovet po delam religioznykh kul'tov*), in charge of relations with all other officially recognized religious groups of the Soviet Union. Each council began to establish a network of commissioners (*upolnomochennye*) in regions and republics, who would report to the council on active religious groups, receive and verify petitions for registration, and handle the registration documents for clergy, cult buildings and religious organizations (Chumachenko 2002: 17-27). In 1965, the councils merged into the Council for Religious Affairs (*Sovet po delam religii*).

The first Commissioner for Religious Cult Affairs in the Mari ASSR was Aleksandr Kharitonovich Nabatov, who served from 1945 until 1952. He took a vivid interest in those forms of local popular religion which did not seem to fit the institutionalized model foreseen by registration requirements, among them village festivals. Nabatov's attempts to determine the religious or secular nature of such festivals showed some of further features of the social imaginary which Soviet secularizers sought to make manifest in festivals.

One feature was the opposition between the people and exploitative religious institutions. Festivals that could be integrated into a historical narrative about the oppression of folk custom by clergy had a potential for offering such a lesson. This was

the case with the Tatar festival *sabantuj* ("festival of the plough" conducted before or

after spring sowing), which according to Nabatov came to be widely celebrated as a

secular village festival by the early fifties. It was carried out as a reward for those

collective farms which had completed spring sowing and the ploughing of fields sown

with winter wheat on time. In 1951, the executive committee and party committee of

Paran'ga district, one of the areas of the Mari ASSR with a compact Tatar population,

celebrated *sabantuj* together with the thirtieth anniversary of the Mari autonomy.[29]

Nabatov's superiors marked this part of his report with a question mark, and Nabatov

himself noted a year later that although *sabantuj* had become "an ordinary civic festival,"

it was still associated with people from the cities traveling to their home villages and

there giving gifts to local mullahs.[30] But in a later atheist propaganda lecture on Soviet

festivals, *sabantuj* is mentioned as a Tatar folk tradition which the mullahs had first tried

to eliminate, "because the folk customs were incompatible with the dogmas of muslim

religion," and then appropriated to their own ends. According to this lecture, the

revolution returned the festival to its true "folk" form complete with the music that had

been forbidden by the clergy and with full participation of both men and women

(Anonymous 1963: 22-23).[31]

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[29] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 151 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1951, July 10, 1951).

[30] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, ll. 27-28 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1952, July 11, 1951). Nabatov adds that the head of the district's financial division met some success in his attempts to stop this practice when he started to tax the mullahs for these gifts.

[31] Natalya Sadomskaya, an ethnographer who emigrated from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, relates a similar story for the festival of Navroz among Caucasian mountaineers, which was legalized in the 1960s after ethnographers argued that this new year celebration was a pre-Muslim, "pagan" custom, and thus more properly understood as national tradition rather than religious ritual (Sadomskaya 1990: 249). Similar instances of deliberate re-paganization occurred in areas with predominantly Christian populations. Fir trees for New Year were promoted from 1935 with the argument that putting them up was a pagan winter custom that had been appropriated by the church for Christmas (Petrone 2000: 86), and summer solstice celebrations with supposedly pre-Christian appellations such as Latvian Ligo or Russian Ivan Kupala were promoted to reclaim the feast day of St. John the Baptist for atheist folk culture (Powell 1975: 69).

A similar use was suggested several times for the contemporaneous Mari spring festival, aga pajrem, first in a regional party committee decision of 1936 in reaction to perceived negative effects of the abolition of Joshkar peledysh pajrem. This decision was apparently never put into practice due to the political atmosphere of struggle against anything that might be perceived as nationalism (Sanukov 2000: 37). After the war, Nabatov repeatedly reported that aga pajrem was indeed taking on purely secular forms as it integrated into collective farm life, and that it would be helpful to further develop such tendencies. If earlier, he wrote in one report, "the leading and decisive role was played by the Mari *kart* – a religious minister, then now the leading role in the organization of the festival is taken by the collective farm administration." In 1949 this "communal feasting without killing of animals and sacrifices" was "obligatory for collective farm workers and had the character of communal merrymaking (*obshchestvennogo uveselenija*)."[32] Only in some places, he had noted the year before, are there such "religious formalities" as special gifts and food to the *kart*, and prayers and petitions to the gods by these priests.[33]

According to Nabatov's observations, many collective farms in the late 1940s and early 1950s organized celebrations of aga pajrem. But this practice was never made official policy, perhaps because among the Mari such agricultural festivals did not represent a past layer of religiosity that had been suppressed by subsequent conversion to a world religion, but constituted the heart of village ritual practice.[34] It was too difficult to

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[32] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 26 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1949, July 16, 1949).

[33] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 96 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1948, July 13, 1948).

[34] That Mari and Tatar festivals were nonetheless seen within the framework of equivalences I described for religion in the Volga region is indicated by the remark of a Mari *kart* to Nabatov in 1951. The *kart* asked why Tatars were allowed to celebrate *sabantuj*, while Maris were prohibited from celebrating semyk

determine whether or not the need to propitiate divinities was still lurking behind the sense that this kind of feasting was "obligatory" for the communal life of a collective farm.

Instead of aga pajrem, peledysh pajrem, the holiday from the 1920s, was eventually revived among the Mari in 1965, during a new wave of anti-religious work.[35] *Sabantuj*, by that time, was well established as a Soviet festival honoring exemplary collective farm workers and celebrating Tatar culture (see Aleksandrova 1978: 93-98 for an account of sabantuj in Paran'ga district in the 1970s). In addition to the fact that chimarij Paganism could not as easily be treated as a historical memory to be played off against more recent religious institutions, the difference in treatment between *sabantuj* and aga pajrem may have been due to the different character of each festival. The features of *sabantuj* that were adapted for secular use were the athletic competitions (wrestling and horse-racing), whose function as rituals linked to the fertility of the fields was ignored in official descriptions, and replaced by ceremonial honoring of exemplary agricultural workers. Aga pajrem was accompanied by less spectacular games (such as egg-throwing contests similar to those conducted at Easter in Russian villages), and was structured around the sacrifice of meatless foods in a special grove or at a tree on the edge of a village's field (Kalinina 2003: 43-77). It seems possible that the spectacular and competitive character of *sabantuj* made it seem less irredeemably "religious," and more

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(GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 151 – Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1951, July 10, 1951).

[35] The decision to celebrate peledysh pajrem in all collective and state farms, settlements and towns of the republic in 1965 was taken by the bureau of the Mari regional party committee on April 28, 1965 (GARME f. P-1, op. 26, d. 23, l. 37 – Minutes of the bureau meeting of the regional party committee). The decision notes that the festival was being carried out in some places, but "without the proper preparation and organization."

similar to the features of the modern spectacles of parades and athletic competitions which the Soviets were introducing (see chapter 7 on spectacle and liturgy).

Caroline Humphrey reports that atheist activists among the Burjats in southern Siberia made a comparable distinction between *suur-kharbaan*, a summer festival with athletic competitions which was adapted into a secular, officially organized holiday accompanied by anti-Buddhist propaganda, and *tsagalgaan*, the lunar new year, which despite suggestions from ethnographers was not turned into a celebration of livestock breeders, but was celebrated in the Burjat collective farms only at the family level and seen as a "religious festival" (Humphrey 1998: 380). The spectacular athletic components of *sabantuj* and *suur-kharbaan*, performed before the whole village, may have facilitated their adaptation to Soviet notions of the openness and visibility of public life. The sanctification and sharing of food during aga pajrem and *tsagalgaan* seemed too closely associated with notions of communion with, and blessing from, spirits, and possibly also with social fragmentation: *tsagalgaan* is an occasion to visit and share food with members of one's kin group (Humphrey 1998: 379-380), and the food blessed at aga pajrem and other Mari sacrifices is brought back to be shared with members of one's own household. Above all, decisions about festivals show how uncomfortable Soviet secularizers were with the indeterminate scope of the social circles involved in religious rituals, something that plagued Nabatov throughout his tenure.

The problem of the Mari cult

Nabatov's tribulations as commissioner for religious cult affairs in the Mari ASSR provide a window into the difficulties of defining what religion was and why it was

harmful. His correspondence contains far more detailed depictions of religious life in the republic than that of his successors. In part this must be because between the time Nabatov was relieved of his post at the end of 1952 and the official merger of both councils in 1965, successive commissioners for Russian Orthodox Church affairs seem to have carried out the functions of the commissioner for religious cults.[36] These later commissioners apparently had little time to deal with groups beyond Russian Orthodox Christians, Protestant "sectarians," and occasionally Muslims, and their reports present a picture of religious life which largely conforms to established confessional boundaries. Nabatov, by contrast, appeared both confused and fascinated by the religious landscape of the post-war Mari ASSR, and his reports often frustrated his Moscow superiors in their local specificity and lack of conformity to the council's ideas of what constituted proper objects of a commissioner's attention.[37] His scrupulously detailed observations tended to

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[36] The commissioner for the affairs of religious cults, Aleksandr Kharitonovich Nabatov, was released from his position at the end of 1952 (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 44 – Note on the margin of Nabatov's report for the third quarter of 1952, October 7, 1952). In 1961 and 1962 Aleksej Grigor'evich Smirnov, who also acted as commissioner for Orthodox Church affairs at the time, appears on lists of commissioners of religious cults for the Mari ASSR (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 1360, l. 141 – List of commissioners of both councils invited to a meeting of both councils; GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 1387, l. 80 – Mailing list for a presentation of council chairman Puzin, October 1962; cf. GARME f. R-836, op. 2, d. 3 – Draft of a letter from commissioner A. Smirnov to the Council for Orthodox Church Affairs, 1961.) Smirnov had succeeded the first commissioner for Russian Orthodox Church affairs, Kuz'ma Alekseevich Shikin, sometime between 1953 and 1960 (GARME f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3 – Letter of Archpriest Nikolaj Bombitskij to Commissioner Shikin, November 12, 1952). A complete reconstruction of personnel arrangements for both councils during those years is difficult, because most records of both councils for the Khrushchev years are still classified in the Russian state archives in Moscow, and in Marij El, where they have been declassified, there are significant gaps in the collection of yearly reports from commissioners. From around 1963, Viktor Ivanovich Savel'ev served as commissioner of Russian Orthodox Church affairs, and after 1965 continued on as commissioner of the unified Council of Religious Affairs (*Sovet po delam religii*) until he was replaced by Vasilij Aleksandrovich Isakov in 1984, who held the position until the council was disbanded in 1990 (GARME f. R-836, op. 1, d. 4, l. 207-208 – Letter from Bishop Mikhail of Gor'kij to V.I. Savel'ev, May 10, 1963; Interview with Isakov, July 2, 2003).

[37] Despite searching the indices of both party and government personnel files in Joshkar-Ola, I have not been able to find a file on Nabatov and hence have no information on his ethnicity, education, and prior residence and work experience. In his reports he repeatedly refers to the shame "we Maris" feel at the persistence of such a primitive religion as Paganism, suggesting that he was himself a Mari (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 74 – Report from Nabatov on the fourth quarter of 1949, January 14, 1950; GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 94 – Report from Nabatov on the second quarter of 1950, July 17, 1950). He also seems to have had at least some command of the Mari language, as he gives names of gods in Mari and

undermine his own attempts to present religion as a harmful remnant of the past, providing insights into the ironies of Soviet thought about religion.

The main disagreement between Nabatov and his superiors lay in the question of what counted as a religious group in the republic. From his first preserved report in 1946, Nabatov noted that the largest religion outside of Russian Orthodoxy was something he called the "Mari cult" (*marijskij kul't*), rites carried out by Maris in "prayer groves" (*v molitvennykh roshchakh*) under the leadership of priests known as *karty* or *muzhany*, who "officiate at prayer ceremonies, slaughter the sacrificial animals, give names to newborns, conclude marriages and funerals."[38] The prayer ceremonies "sometimes constitute a mass gathering" (*byvajut massovymi*). For instance, at a ceremony in the Kozhsola rural soviet of Sernur district, offerings amounting to twelve thousand rubles, three wagonloads of linen, and much leather and wool were collected and given over to the national defense fund.[39]

Pointing to the significant numbers of worshippers these gatherings attracted, Nabatov raised the question of their legalization and the registration of communities of adherents of the "Mari cult" as religious organizations. He enclosed a list of Mari gods (giving Mari names and Russian translations), and gave noticeably shorter treatment to the Old Believers, Muslims, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jews who also fell

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also occasionally quotes and translates Mari proverbs. In terms of his professional training, his correspondence shows that he was also in charge of supervising logging activities in the republic. At one point, the council chairman reproaches him that his reports are not at the level expected of a man of his "general and political erudition," suggesting that he may have had higher education and/or a prior career in the party bureaucracy (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 71 – Letter from Council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, November 26, 1947). The latter would coincide with the observation of several historians that many early commissioners came either out of the party bureaucracy or from the KGB (Chumachenko 2002: 24-25; Kolymagin 2004: 115).

[38] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 1 (Report by commissioner Nabatov to the Council for the fourth quarter of 1945, received January 22, 1946).

[39] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 2.

under his responsibility. None of these denominations, at that point, had legally registered organizations, although Nabatov was beginning to receive petitions – one about the opening of a mosque in the Tatar village of Kul'bash and one each from the Baptists and Adventists about registering organizations in Joshkar-Ola.

The council apparently gave some consideration to Nabatov's argument that the "Mari cult" deserved its attention. Council member Fil'chenkov, who was sent on inspection to the Mari ASSR in February 1946, reported that although the Mari were for the most part considered "baptized in the orthodox faith," a substantial part of the population were "under the influence of the Mari cult," shown by the numbers of people – going into the thousands – who had attended the region-wide "world prayer ceremonies" (*mirovye molenija*) up to 1924 and again in 1945, when ten such ceremonies were held, involving the sacrifice of sheep, geese and ducks.[40] Commenting on the contents of Mari prayers, Fil'chenkov introduced an expression into the correspondence which would reoccur frequently – their "materialist character." This religion, he explained, "tightly links with economic needs, with the peasant economy. So it can be said that this cult has a production-oriented (*proizvodstvennyj*) character."[41] At the same time, to alleviate one "material" concern of Soviet officials, he reported that since collectivization, there had been no instances of sacrifice of animals owned by collective farms, all animals being privately purchased. Nor were the priests enriching themselves

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[40] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, ll. 7-8 (Report of Council member Fil'chenkov on a voyage of inspection to the Mari ASSR, March 6, 1946).
[41] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 10.

through the ceremonies: meat was consumed on the spot, and other offerings were handed over to the defense fund.[42]

More disturbing from the council's point of view was the attitude of local officials and party members toward these ceremonies. Fil'chenkov reports that the current chairman of the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Mari ASSR, when he was secretary of the party committee of a rural district, had negotiated a settlement with a Mari priest that a fall ceremony in the middle of harvest season could be carried out at night undisturbed, as long as the collective farm workers reported for work in the morning. Petitions by Maris to conduct ceremonies were sometimes accompanied by declarations of the collective farm or rural soviet chairman that these organs had no objections.[43]

Noting that tsarist persecutions of Mari ceremonies had had no effect, Fil'chenkov reported that members of the Mari intelligentsia and workers of state and party organs quite often participated in ceremonies, "commenting on them with enthusiasm, without seeing anything compromising in them."[44] Christian rituals, by contrast, were carried out by Maris "extremely pro forma," and before the closing of the churches in the late 1930s

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[42] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 8-9. The League of the Militant Godless did report the attempted sacrifice of a horse belonging to the collective farm in the kolkhoz „Second five-year-plan" in Kuzhener district in 1939, which was averted through timely „unmasking" (GARME f. R-118, op. 1, d. 2, l. 364 – Yearly report of the Kuzhener district council of the League of the Militant Godless for 1939, no date). Like all Stalin-era denunciations, this one should of course be read with some scepticism, but it also raises the question whether anyone could have had trustworthy information on all the sacrifices of the 1930s and 40s.

[43] Examples of such petitions are attached to Fil'chenkov's report and a later report from Nabatov. See GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 16 (Petition from citizens of the village of Bol'shaja Orsha to Commissioner Nabatov, November 30, 1945); GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 9-13 (Petitions and supporting documents from citizens of Pektubaevo district and Uspenka village to commissioner Nabatov, September 15 and October 19, 1951).

[44] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 12.

many Maris preferred to lock the doors of their houses rather than receiving an Orthodox priest.[45]

The "Mari cult" thus posed challenges to Soviet understandings of religion in several ways. First, its followers did not form stable communities, and many of the people who practiced it were considered to be adherents of the Orthodox Church. The phrase "spontaneous appearance" (*javochnyj porjadok*, the same as one might say about a drop-in class without prior registration) occurs again and again in Nabatov's reports on Mari religious practices, and also on prayer gatherings near Tatar graveyards for major Muslim festivals and on pilgrimages to sacred springs in which Russian Old Believers, baptized and unbaptized Maris, and Muslim Tatars participated.

The denominational indeterminacy of participants and the long intervals between religious gatherings made it difficult to envision registration, but the numbers of people and the value of offerings gathered at such occasions made them hard to ignore for a government interested in controlling both the spiritual lives of its citizens and the economy. Also, the history of tsarist persecutions against Mari adherents raised the question of how the actions of the Soviet regime would be perceived. Officially Soviet religious policy had abolished the privileges that had been accorded the Orthodox Church before the revolution, but if churches could be registered and sacred groves could not, there would be a risk of the appearance of favoritism. Nonetheless, Fil'chenkov and later Nabatov suggested that an "enlivening of the activities of the Orthodox Church" in those

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[45] Ibid.

districts with the most ritual activity of followers of the "Mari cult" might be advisable in order to steer religious practices into legal bounds.[46]

Eventually, the council took the position that "like other pagan cults, the Mari one does not constitute an object of the Council for Religious Cult Affairs"[47] and that it was "inexpedient to pose the question in terms of any kind of legalization of the factually occurring rituals, prayer meetings and the like."[48] The commissioners of both councils were asked, however, to gather information on the geographical distribution and number of adherents of the cult, the character of the sacrifices, the level of influence of the *karty* and the amount of meat and other offerings which they kept for themselves. To obtain this information, the councils authorized the commissioners to consult with "priests of the orthodox church and other individuals whom you find possible to use, of course without contacting the karty."[49] Russian Orthodox priests were potential authorities for obtaining information in this matter, the chimarij priests were not – because, as a later instruction for Nabatov specifies, contacting them would amount to giving them official recognition as religious ministers (*sluzhiteli kul'ta*).[50]

The decision reflects a bureaucracy's preference for dealing with institutionalized religion with an identifiable group of followers and set times and locations of worship. It also shows the attempt to situate religions on an evolutionary ladder leading from more primitive forms via more advanced ones toward enlightened unbelief. Although he could

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[46] Quote from GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 15; Nabatov's suggestion along similar lines is in GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 122 (Report from commissioner Nabatov for the third quarter of 1950, October 12, 1950).
[47] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 19 (Draft of a report from council chairman Poljanskij to the Central Committee, no date).
[48] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 23 (Letter from the vice chairmen of the Councils for the Affairs of Religious Cults and the Affairs of the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church, January 22, 1946).
[49] Ibid.

have argued from Soviet law that religious gatherings which took place outdoors and

without a formalized system of membership were inevitably illegal,[51] the Council's

chairman suggested that encouraging Mari rituals would amount to a step back on the

evolutionary ladder:

> The recognition of the "Mari cult" would artificially revive extremely backward
> religious beliefs or beliefs which under contemporary circumstances have taken
> on different, not at all religious forms and content. You yourself remark that the
> sect "Kugu sorta," in which the Mari cult presented itself in its most finished form
> has almost completely died out at present. And the mass prayer ceremonies of the
> Maris, such as "Aga Pajram," transform over time into national festivals of sorts,
> in which elements of religion are slowly erased.[52]

The reference to aga pajrem, a ceremony conducted before or after spring sowing, is in

reaction to Nabatov's descriptions of Mari ceremonial life. It is characteristic of this

whole correspondence that the council chairman is drawing conclusions from Nabatov's

reports which eliminate the ambiguity and conflicting tendencies to which Nabatov

persistently points. In the draft letter to the Central Committee, the council states that

Mari ceremonies cause "considerable harm to agriculture" and "are usually carried out

during the height of agricultural work."[53] This is most probably a generalization from

Fil'chenkov's story about the fall ceremony which was conducted at night on the

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[50] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 64 (Letter from Council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, July 31, 1947).

[51] These prohibitions stem from the 1929 Sovnarkom resolution "On religious organizations" and were most likely primarily directed against Orthodox icon processions and pilgrimages to sacred sites. Nabatov was aware of this law, as no doubt were his superiors. He referred to the prohibition of "religious rituals conducted in the open air on a come-who-may basis (javochnym porjadkom)" in his lecture "The origin and reactionary essence of Mari cults," prepared for the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge in 1950 (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 108). But to my surprise, this law was not used as immediate grounds for deciding against legalization of Mari prayer gatherings in 1946/47, but Council members recurred to the more complex line of argument which I try to reconstruct here.

[52] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 64 (Letter from Council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, July 31, 1947). Kugu sorta (Big candle) was a reform movement that rejected animal sacrifice and unsuccessfully sought recognition as a religious group worthy of toleration in the late imperial period. Its followers were viciously persecuted during the Stalin era (Werth 2001; Y. Wichmann 1932).

initiative of the district party secretary. But Nabatov's reports give a less clear picture of the harm done by Mari ceremonies, and even though he himself repeatedly expresses hope that their religious content is "being erased" and they can be used as a basis of celebrations of ethnic culture, what he reports from the ground points to the difficulty of distinguishing "religious" from "cultural" content.

First, Nabatov's observations do not confirm that Mari ceremonies always occur "at the height of agricultural work." In his draft of a letter to the district executive committees of the republic Nabatov notes the following times for ceremonies: "in the spring before the beginning of the spring sowing campaign – agapajrem (aga – ploughing, pajrem – holiday), in the interim after spring sowing – semik, and in the fall after bringing in the harvest and sowing winter grains."[54] As might be expected of the ritual cycle of peasants, these festivals seem timed to fall into times of relative quiet in between, before, or after the major work tasks of the year. What is more, the commissioner increasingly discovers how difficult it is to come up with proof that these festivals are harmful to the economy. In fact, he keeps reporting evidence that points to their usefulness at least from the point of view of rural administrators and collective farm chairmen.

As evidence of "harm to the population," Nabatov lists the numbers of animals sacrificed and notes that during the days leading up to a "world prayer ceremony" in the fall of 1946 "hundreds of horses" were used by thousands of participants from various

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[53] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 19.
[54] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 22 (Draft of a letter from Nabatov to the district executive committees, no date, ca. January 1946). The letter was evidently never sent because the recommendations made in it ran counter to the directives Nabatov received from the council in response. In October 1946 Nabatov sent a draft of another letter (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 44-46), which was also disapproved by the council as too "unconcrete and apologetic" (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 48 – Letter from vice chairman Sadovskij to Nabatov, January 30, 1947).

parts of the republic to travel to the ceremonial site near Kupsola in a northwestern district, implying that this caused disruption of agricultural work.[55] But in the same 1947 report he also states that collective farm administrations themselves are sending petitions for permission to conduct prayer ceremonies, and that these come from successful farms which fulfill their requirements for grain requisitions.[56] A year later, having attended a ceremony, Nabatov notes that a number of collective farm chairmen told him that "these sacrifices bring people closer together; that afterwards the population works more willingly, more willingly and better responds to the demands which are made of the population."[57]

The latter quote comes from a report which is apparently structured by a catalogue of questions. Under the heading "Influence of the cults on the masses," Nabatov gives examples of such influence which sound rather positive, contrary probably to the expectations of those who formulated the questions. Since local soviets were only allowing the population to carry out sacrificial ceremonies if their collective farm had fulfilled its quota of grain requisitions (the same goes for the completion of spring ploughing before the Tatar *sabantuj*), there was "I would say, a dependence of the collective farms on the observance of religious cults" which was "almost being promoted by local soviets."[58] Some of the local administrative bodies also drew direct material benefit from the ceremonies. At the 1948 ceremony Nabatov attended, offerings were sold and the proceeds divided between savings towards the cost of next year's ceremony and the collective farm's budget. Later during his tenure Nabatov discovered the

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[55] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 52 (Report from Nabatov for the first quarter of 1947, April 21, 1947).
[56] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 52 v.
[57] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 5 (Report from Nabatov for the fourth quarter of 1948, January 18, 1949).

phenomenon of pilgrimages to sacred springs, where he found that in one case offerings were collected by the collective farm chairman (during a pilgrimage on the Ninth Friday [after Easter] to a spring in the Pumari rural soviet).[59] In another case, the offerings made at the Shabashi spring on the day of the Kazan' icon of the Mother of God in July 1952 became the object of a dispute between the collective farm and the rural soviet.[60]

Nabatov's readers understood these cases as instances of "accommodationalism,"[61] where people in leadership positions made concessions to the religious beliefs of their workers. They were troubling because of what they revealed about the deep entanglement between religious practice, local economies, and local social relations. While Nabatov was struggling to provide his superiors with evidence for the economic harm done by religion, local leaders were obviously finding religious ritual helpful in meeting the strenuous demands placed on Soviet agricultural producers in the post-war years (cf. Nove 1982: 298-304). They may have interpreted the end of violent anti-religious persecutions as a sign that their superiors would not take them to task for permitting ritual observances. Nabatov's awareness that these customs should in theory have no place in the life of a Soviet collective is expressed in one of his characteristic musings which provoked the usual angry red underlinings from his superiors: religious festivals "are alien to our Soviet person" but sometimes they "enter into communion with

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[58] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 8.
[59] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 18 (Report from Nabatov for the first quarter of 1952, April 7, 1952)
[60] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 41 (Report from Nabatov for the third quarter of 1952, October 7, 1952).
[61] This term appears in a note written in red pencil by a Moscow reader on the margin of one of Nabatov's reports, beside a paragraph referring to local authorities permitting sabantuj after the completion of the ploughing of the fields for winter grain, and Mari sacrificial ceremonies in the fall after the fulfilment of state grain delivery quotas: "Does this not constitute accommodationalism (*prisposoblenchestvom*)?" (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 31 – Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1949, July 16, 1949).

communal life (*vstupajut v obshchenie s obshchestvennoj zhizn'ju*), sometimes they directly or indirectly promote, help in the fulfillment of particular economic tasks."[62]

In the case of the Tatar village of Kul'bash, home to the only functioning mosque in the post-war Mari ASSR, the same close connection between religious practice and the collective farm leadership emerges. After the opening of the mosque, the local collective farm "Kzyl bajrak" "began to excel in its work, shows initiative in community affairs" and was repeatedly held up as an example on the district radio. "As if as a service in exchange for the opening of the mosque," the collective farm had built a bridge and a fire shed and was currently building a communal bathhouse. It had also constructed a minaret for the mosque.[63] A few months later Nabatov reported that the mosque was also serving as a place of public announcements, for instance for persuading people to buy government bonds,[64] provoking severe reproaches from his superiors for having allowed the mosque to be transformed into a "communal-political organization."[65]

The prohibition against such double uses of religious institutions shows how Soviet policies attempted to exclude any interactions with non-human agents from proper

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[62] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 39.

[63] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 52 v. (Report from Nabatov for the first quarter of 1947, April 21, 1947). The same village had gone to considerable length to forestall the closing of the mosque before the war: when an order came to close the mosque in order to use it as a school and as office of the rural soviet, villagers built both a school and a building for the soviet (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 27 – Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1946, July 5, 1946). The mosque was closed eventually, but in 1940, it was one of only five houses of worship in the republic that were still functioning, the others being the Orthodox churches of Kuknur, Krasnogorka and Morkijaly and the chapel at the Shabashi spring (GARME f. R-118, op. 1, d. 24., l. 31 – Information on the correctness of use of closed prayer buildings in the republic's districts, no date, ca. 1940).The rural soviet chairman Il'jazov provoked the censure of the republic's antireligious propagandists for being under the influence of the "churchmen" and refusing to take steps toward the closure of the mosque (GARME f. R-118, op. 1, d. 13, l. 18 – Report on the work of the Mari republican council of the League of the Militant Godless for 1939, February 2, 1940).

[64] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 75 (Report from Nabatov for the fourth quarter of 1947, January 19, 1948).

[65] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 79 (Letter from council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, February 24, 1948).

community life.[66] In principle, the cases presented so far could be read as evidence that local leaders shared the same ontological assumptions and were merely using religious forms in order to strengthen human community. But an even more disturbing example showed the leadership of a collective farm evidently putting their hopes directly in the efficacy of a ritual. In June 1948, the administration of the collective farm *Samolet* (Airplane) in Zashizhem'e rural soviet (in one of the northwestern districts of the ASSR) sacrificed a horse in a sacred grove and held the subsequent ritual feast in the collective farm stables.

> The collective farm administration explains that they have insufficient numbers of horses, and they, in order to fill the ranks of the horses, carried out a public prayer ceremony, a killing of livestock – of a horse – and carried out the feasting of the congregants in the horses' stalls, at the immediate spot where the collective farm experiences, by their explanation, misfortune, a lack of horses. They explain that in consequence of the prayer ceremony and the killing of livestock the collective farm should experience more prosperity, a better growth of the stock of horses.[67]

Again, it is an overall successful farm which is doing this: because the collective farm is more prosperous than others in the district, they were able to exchange a bull for a horse that was unfit for work, and to sacrifice that horse.[68] The district executive committee charged the workers of the collective farm for the financial damage to the collective. But the economic calculation of those engaging in the ritual had been different. By conducting a sacrifice and feast at a place of economic lack, they expected to remedy that

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[66] With a similar logic, religious organizations were prohibited from engaging in charity work (Kolymagin 2004: 51).

[67] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 97 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1948, July 13, 1948).

[68] Ibid. This is the only mention of a horse as sacrificial animal in Nabatov's correspondence, although pre-collectivization sources mention horses as common sacrifices for high-ranking gods. The use of a horse unfit for work seems to be a compromise with the economic and legal constraints of the post-collectivization era, since older ethnographic sources as well as late twentieth-century Mari literature

lack. The collective farm leadership apparently did not realize how politically importune it was to offer such an explanation to the commissioner of a central state organ.

Together with other evidence, this case contradicted Nabatov's repeated assurances that rituals had "outlived their formerly existing religious character" (*izzhili ranee imevshujusja religioznost'*)[69] and were becoming purely social gatherings. Rather, as he puts it on other occasions, rituals were "perfecting themselves, adapting to the conditions and demands of life."[70] This was troubling in the light of an evolutionist theory of history, because if religion was capable of adapting, it might also have a future.

Nabatov's reports on the consequences of economic reforms instituted in 1950 present more evidence of such adaptation. In 1950, collective farms in the republic were consolidated, and Nabatov found that ritual communities had adapted, now gathering for sacrifices at the scale of the enlarged farms.[71] A year later, reporting on the fall season of sacrifices, he notes proudly that due to recent "efforts toward the preservation of livestock" Mari sacrifices were "significantly reduced," only to add a few lines down that a number of collective farms contributed calves and sheep from collective ownership, something that Fil'chenkov five years before claimed had never happened.[72]

The years between 1948 and 1952 were a time when high taxes on privately owned livestock and garden plots led many peasants to stop raising their own cattle, sheep and fowl (Nove 1982: 303), diminishing what, according to earlier reports, had

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emphasize that sacrificial animals should ideally be young and without blemish (Popov and Tanygin 2003: 202-209; Sebeok and Ingemann 1956: 166-167).

[69] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 25 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1949, July 16, 1949).

[70] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 38 (Letter from Nabatov to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Mari ASSR, October 18, 1949).

[71] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l.127 (Report from Nabatov on the fourth quarter of 1950, January 9, 1951).

been the usual source of animals for sacrifice since collectivization. Some collective farm chairmen were apparently open to being persuaded to donate collectively owned livestock instead. Nabatov does not offer an opinion on the motivation of these chairmen, but their action certainly demonstrates the close interdependence between religious rituals and collective farms, which he had been emphasizing to his superiors for years. But by early 1952, the council seems to have decided that untangling these interconnections was not its responsibility. In response to his report on the economics of sacrifice, Nabatov received a short reply chiding him for dwelling too much on the "Mari cult" and saying too little about the other religions of the republic, and his position was terminated at the end of the year.[73]

Nabatov's observations in the Mari republic constantly undermined his own attempts to provide his superiors with expected evidence of the harmfulness and decline of religion. Instead of doing economic harm, religious ritual seemed to be appreciated by local leaders as an engine of productivity; instead of being a thing of the past, it was practiced by prospering collective farms and was adapting in its forms. Instead of becoming a celebration of purely human achievements and sociality, rituals were still expected to produce effects that were impossible by human strength alone. But Nabatov was right to note that ritual observances dramatized boundaries that were parochial by Soviet standards.

To some degress, this of narrow parochialness was itself a response to Soviet restrictions (Dragadze 1993; Kormina 2006: 141-142). There is no evidence for persisting

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[72] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 7 (Report from Nabatov on the fourth quarter of 1951, January 7, 1952).
[73] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 14 (Letter from council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, February 5, 1952).

interregional Mari sacrifices after the immediate post-war years. With the prohibition of outdoor processions and pilgrimages, even legally recognized religious organizations could not organize their activities along the pattern of ascending regional scope that was typical for Soviet secular celebrations, where festivals such as peledysh pajrem were celebrated first in individual collective farms, then in the district center, and finally in the capital Joshkar-Ola, with the more centralized celebrations featuring selected workers or folk ensembles from villages or districts.[74]

But the localization of rural religiosity was hardly an invention of atheist polemics. In the interregional gatherings at sacred springs or groves that Soviet officials sought to suppress, there was a host village on whose territory the site was located. That non-residents could be guests, but remained to some degree outsiders is suggested by the way in which local authorities felt entitled to the offerings made at pilgrimages to their sacred springs. An even more exclusive view of religious community is demonstrated by one of Nabatov's report from Paran'ga district. Because the district had the most concentrated Tatar population of the republic, Nabatov was considering recommending the reopening of a mosque in one of its villages. The district executive committee was against it, he reported, because the opening of one mosque would cause a flood of petitions from other villages. "By established custom, Tatar-muslims don't go, don't visit the mosque [even] of their neighboring village," as the district chairman had explained.[75] Even where the ritual community expanded to include new clusters of villages linked

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[74] GARME, f. P-14, op. 18, d. 5, l. 5-6 (Resolution of the Novyj-Tor"jal district committee on the organization of the festival "Peledysh pajrem," May 12, 1965); *Marijskaja Pravda,* June 22, 1965, p. 1. Caroline Humphrey notes a similar spatial structure in the organization of *suur-kharbaan* in the Buryat ASSR (1998: 380-381).

[75] GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 26-27 (Report from Nabatov for the second quarter of 1949, July 16, 1949).

through a recently established collective farm, rural religion remained associated with much smaller scales of communal solidarity than those promoted by the narrative of the friendship of the peoples voluntarily uniting in the Soviet Union. As later atheist activists became increasingly hard-pressed to present evidence for the harm of religion, they singled out this tie of particular local residents with their particular gods, saints, and sacred sites as antithetical to the social solidarity expected of a good Soviet citizen.

Religion as social isolation

In the Brezhnev era, a budding empirical sociology applied itself to the task of explaining the persistence and persistent harmfulness of religion under mature socialism. These sociologists decided that one of the problems with religion was that it was both a consequence of social fragmentation, and a contributing factor to its perpetuation. In the words of one scholar involved in the atheist section of the Mari division of the Knowledge Society, a religious person is a person "whose links to society for some reason or other are insufficient in some places (low level of education, underdeveloped spiritual needs) or are even completely lacking (self-isolation from the social-political life of the collective, separation from the work collective)" (Sofronov 1973: 8).

Among other things, this fragmentation was thought to manifest itself in interethnic relations. The sociologist Viktor Stepanovich Solov'ev, who carried out surveys of beliefs and traditions of the population of the Mari ASSR in 1972 and 1985, concluded that Tatar and Mari believers were less likely to speak Russian at home, cutting themselves off from this "important medium of active communion with (*aktivnogo priobshchenija k*) social practice, with the achievements of science,

technology, and Soviet and world culture" (Solov'ev 1987: 144). Believers of all nationalities were more critical of interethnic marriage (3.2 percent of atheists objected to them compared to 10.5 percent of believers, Solov'ev 1987: 145). And commenting on the separation of Tatar and Mari graveyards, Solov'ev argued that this was proof that "customary orders set up by religion, even after losing their religious content and religious basis to a considerable degree, have become national traditions of far from positive character" (Solov'ev 1987: 147-148).

Solov'ev's ideal of an atheist society was one in which people would transcend ethnic or village selfishness and recognize "the indivisible unity of national [i.e. ethnic] interests with the interests of the Soviet people as a whole" (Solov'ev 1987: 145). This transcendence was measured in views about interethnic relations as much as in participation in modern Soviet culture. Even after adjusting figures for differences between age groups and rural and urban residents, Solov'ev's statistics showed that self-identified religious believers participated less in the media and social practices that bound a person to Soviet society as a whole. In 1985, people who had never held religious beliefs read an average of 2.3 books per months, people who had abandoned religion 2, and religious believers and people wavering between belief and nonbelief less than one. For attendance of public film showings, lifelong atheists averaged 1.5 per month, believers and waverers 0.4 (Solov'ev 1987: 116).

Solov'ev never addresses the question of how he can demonstrate the causal role of religion in any of these statistics, although he is certainly one of the most careful atheist thinkers of the republic. But what he stresses in his interpretation is not so much the causal role of religion, but the causal role of atheism in connecting inhabitants of the

republic to larger Soviet and world contexts and overcoming divisions within local communities. He is thus proposing atheism as the solution to the dilemma faced by Commissioner Nabatov in his struggles to dissolve the entanglements of rural religious observances with rural economic and communal structures. Like separate graveyards, attempts by collective farms to divert animals from the national productive cycle for the benefit of the local farm are symptoms of a vicious circle between religion and the limited horizons of rural life that atheism can break open.

In practice, the struggle to break open rural communities was never conducted in earnest in the post-war Mari ASSR. Often of local origin and always educated in the rhetoric about the value of ethnic cultures, Soviet officials were susceptible to the idea that rural religion was relatively harmless. In several Mari villages people told me that ceremonies continued throughout the Soviet era, especially in the more remote districts, often with the knowledge and non-interference of local party and Komsomol secretaries. Sometimes a zealous newcomer in the village or in the district committee caused trouble, but even officials from the center could be understanding. One woman who had worked for the Sovetskij district committee of the CPSU in the early 1980s told me how she and two other district secretaries were sent to a village to dissuade the population from conducting a ceremony during the summer agricultural season. Knowing that the result of their work would be checked by a police patrol on the projected day of the ceremony, she ended up making a compromise similar to the one Council for Religious Cults inspector Fil'chenkov was told about in 1946. She persuaded the village elders to move the ceremony to another day, when there would be no police control in the village. This

woman claimed that even at that time, neither she nor her colleagues understood why they should struggle against traditional rituals that were not doing any harm.[76]

It is worth noting that Paganism's status of operating outside of legality but being treated with leniency continues into the present. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a previously existing chimarij organization was denied registration by the Ministry of Justice under the 1997 law for reasons of not having existed long enough.[77] This denial notwithstanding, Pagans are favored over the members of many registered organizations when it comes to representation on the consultative council and sponsorship of religious and educational events from the Ministry of Culture and other public institutions. Here, the ideal of equal and visible representation of each of the three major ethnic groups of the republic takes precedence over legal registration requirements.

Post-Soviet communities – postsecular religion?

The idea that social life in the Mari republic is shaped through the friendly interaction of three distinct ethnic groups – Maris, Russians, and Tatars – was promoted by such Soviet policies as the creation of ethnic festivals. It is thus a sign of the success of the Soviet policy of treating ethnicity as a universally meaningful level of identity (T. Martin 2001; Slezkine 1994b) that religion has been so seamlessly integrated into the catalogue of required markers of a proper ethnic group, alongside costume, dances, music, food and language (cf. Khalid 2007).

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[76] Field notes, August 29, 2005.
[77] By 2005, a renamed organization under changed leadership was beginning to encounter success with a new strategy of registration. Instead of first seeking registration on the level of the republic, they were registering district-level organizations in those parts of the republic where chimarij ritual had a strong presence. By the end of 2005, they had achieved registration in two districts and were quite optimistic about their chances for republic-wide registration once they had a few more, as a staff member of the Mari Cultural Center explained to me.

The career of the sociologist Viktor Solov'ev exemplifies the move toward considering religion as a positive, but subordinate attribute of ethnicity. Born in 1934 in a Mari village, Solov'ev started public life as a teacher, CPSU lecturer, and member of the Knowledge Society (helping, for instance, to promote the revival of peledysh pajrem through a book about the history and recommended current form of the festival, Solov'ev 1966). He later acquired two doctorates from the Moscow Institute of Scientific Atheism and eventually became the second Mari member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. In collaboration with the Moscow institute, he conducted the sociological surveys on religion and atheism of 1972 and 1985. Modeled on a study of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR carried out in 1971-72 (Pivovarov 1971, 1974), the survey questions already combined questions about religious belief with questions about knowledge of particular ethnic customs and opinions about interethnic relations.

By 1991, Solov'ev presented himself as a scholar of nationalities questions, with a brochure entitled "Ethnic diversity is our wealth" (*Mnogonatsional'nost' – nashe bogatstvo*). In this text, religion still plays an important role, but is seen as a tool for preserving "national" culture. Paganism is referred to as "the deepest and most natural merging of religious and national elements of spiritual culture" (Solov'ev 1991: 116), while the Russian Orthodox Church is criticized for having "actively fought against the national traditions of the people whose name it took for itself – the Russian people" (118). The development of Solov'ev's thought paralleled intellectual trends in Soviet ethnography since the late 1960s, when the concept of the ethnos regained respectability as a historically important social formation alongside class (Bromlej 1973; Rybakov

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2001). How commonsensical this thinking has become over the decades of Soviet rule is shown by the development of Soviet ethnic festivals in post-Soviet Marij El.

Since the early 1990s, *sabantuj*, peledysh pajrem and the Russian *berezka* ("birch tree," a festival created to replace Pentecost, see Paxson 2005: 335-337) are celebrated in Joshkar-Ola on June 12, Russia's independence day, each in a separate park (Luehrmann 2005a: 51). Religious dignitaries are present on the Mari and Tatar festival grounds, though not at the Russian *berezka*, because the Orthodox diocese takes a very cautious stance toward equating itself with Russian folklore. The mufti occupies a place of honor among the spectators of the athletic competitions for *sabantuj*, and the chimarij high priest of Marij El opens peledysh pajrem with an invocation to Osh Kugu Jumo, the White Great God.[78]

While we have seen in the beginning of this chapter that the equation of religion and ethnicity can provide a framework for a variety of tactics of inclusion and exclusion, government agencies interpret it quite rigidly at this level of state representation. In 2001, the Charismatic Christian Center lost a lawsuit against the city of Joshkar-Ola after being denied permission to conduct a tent evangelizing concert in one of the city's parks during the June 12 festivities. The official in charge of religious affairs in the presidential administration told me about this case with visible exasperation: "All sites in the city are already distributed (*raspisany*) on this day. Who do these people think they are, that they can come here a week ago yesterday and tell us, give us a place for our tent?"[79] As with the Lutherans, religious groups new to the republic are confronted with the idea that there

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[78] Based on my own observations in 2001 and 2003, and reports in the Mari-language daily *Marij El*, June 15, 2005, pp. 1, 6.
[79] Interview notes, June 26, 2003. See also Luehrmann 2005a: 43.

is already an established harmony of separate but equivalent groups, which should not be upset by new additions demanding public recognition.[80]

This chapter can be read as telling a story of a public sphere that was constructed to the exclusion of and in opposition to religion, but has now come to include it. Thinking back to the concept of postsecular religion discussed in the introduction, three things stand out. First of all, material from the Mari ASSR cautions us that the public sphere of the Soviet era was secular under the condition that many troubling questions about the permeability of human community to non-human forces were ignored. Just as it was hard for Nabatov to determine what a collective farm chairman meant when he declared that the celebration of aga pajrem was a communal obligation, so it seems hard to determine where the boundaries of ritual and spectacle are when the High Priest of Marij El enters the stage to pray after two actors dressed as kart-vlak have recited a prayer written for them by festival planners.[81] It becomes even harder in cases where, as I describe in chapter 4, a village ceremony becomes a didactic example for those who might wish to replicate it in their own village. In a region that cannot look back at a long history of disenchantment through religious reform, the diffusion of post-secular religion into all

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[80] Nabatov used much the same argument as far back as 1946, when he stated that he saw no need to register Baptists in Joshkar-Ola, "because there never used to be organizations of evangelical christians here and just the orthodox church is sufficient." (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 31 – Information about the number of active religious communities which are still unregistered in the Mari ASSR, July 5, 1946). Nabatov's superiors rebuked him for this statement, explaining that it was not a valid argument against registration (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 30 – Letter from vice chairman Sadovskij to Nabatov, August 3, 1946). They did not express any disapproval of his later strategy of delaying registration through getting the fire inspector to declare a succession of potential meeting houses purchased by the Baptists to be unsafe (GARF f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 96 – Report from Nabatov on the second quarter of 1950, July 17, 1950).
[81] This sequence is foreseen in the scenario for peledysh pajrem distributed by the Mari Cultural Center in 2005 (copy in possession of the author). As Alaina Lemon (2000: 23-24) notes, such ambiguity between performance as make-belief and performance as carrying out a socially recognized role exists in both English and Russian ways of speaking about performance, but there are social situations in which the ambiguity becomes troubling or salient.

areas of life (Höhn 2007: 38) is hard to distinguish from the longstanding diffuseness of religion that exasperated secularizers.

Second, there are nonetheless important changes in the kind of social life with which religion enters into contact. The element of spectacle and public display stands out as an important facet of post-Soviet social life and religion. In the June 12 celebrations, religion, ethnicity, and public spectacle are intertwined in a way that is different from the intertwining of sacrifice, community, and economics that troubled Nabatov: the relevant community is far bigger than the villages he dealt with, and the importance of public visibility and public equality of religious identities means that there is a new possible role for outsiders besides that of guest-participant: the role of spectator who accords recognition and learns from the event.[82] The turn toward didactic spectacle has social and theological consequences for religious communities whose investigation will take up much of the remainder of this dissertation.

In that investigation, I will be guided by a third idea about postsecular religion which I believe this chapter corroborates: when studying postsecular religion, there are insights to be gained from the critiques secularizers levied against religion. This is so for two reasons. First, secularizing measures can themselves have unintended consequences, for instance they can introduce new social imaginaries to which religion then has to adapt. But second, beyond such self-fulfilling prophecy, critics of religion can formulate

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[82] To qualify this claim somewhat, the importance of public representative display of religious identities had already been on the rise in the decades before the revolution. The Mari movement Kugu sorta, for instance, presented a booth devoted to their religion at the Kazan Scientific and Industrial Exhibition in 1890 as part of an effort to gain recognition as a religion worthy of toleration (Werth 2001: 154). It could then be said that the Soviet era temporarily excluded religious groups from continuing to participate in the developing practices of public spectacle. But as the remainder of this dissertation shows, religious groups are not picking up where they left off after the revolution, but contemporary religious activists often have a background in the specific Soviet practices of didactic spectacle.

sharper questions about its power than those asked by committed practitioners or disengaged observers.

For example, at the heart of Nabatov's inquiries into what was religious and what was cultural about rural life lay what has been described as the double movement of religion, horizontally connecting people and (for a lack of a more multi-dimensional spatial imagination) vertically connecting them to something other-than-human (Lincoln 1994: 2-3). More keenly perhaps than many disengaged theorists of religion, atheist activists felt the tension between these two movements, because their attempts to imitate and replace the first movement were threatened by the second. When I spoke to Viktor Solov'ev (then vice-dean of the faculty of law of Mari State University) on several occasions in 2005/06, he first addressed the link between religion and human solidarity as an obstacle to atheist work, stating that religion had been a focus of feelings of ethnic inequality among the Mari population, many of whom thought that it was unfair that Russians were allowed to have their churches while Mari ceremonies were prohibited. But then he added another thought, which pointed into the direction of religion as radically non-social, suggesting a different reason why it proved difficult to eradicate. Citing Marx, he said that he had always understood that there were people who still needed the "opium" of religion, even if he himself did not. For instance, a lonely woman widowed during the war could find in religion "what society cannot give her" – the joy of a relationship with god to compensate her loneliness (never mind if it is an imaginary relationship, the steadfast atheist Solov'ev added).[83]

From this point of view, the power of religion does not lie solely in its capacity to fuel social loyalties which rival adherence to the Soviet society. Rather, it is effective at a

level that is at the same time more personal and less humanist, filling gaps left by society's efforts to take care of people, to educate and entertain them. Like the concern of the inhabitants of Ljupersola with being buried in the village graveyard, the interpretations offered by Solov'ev seem to point into two different directions of how one may understand religion – both as a vehicle for creating human community and something that strains the limits of a community that is thought of as exclusively human.

In the following chapter, I will look at pedagogical practices as a field of encounter between these two dimensions of religion and the Soviet social imaginary. In methodical approaches to knowledge transmission, I argue, a Soviet concern with changing the scale and scope of human community through mobilization comes into interplay with practices that hone the capacities of a human devotee to connect to non-human beings. From this chapter, I retain the intuition of Soviet anti-religious workers that religion was at once an instrument of social cohesion – and could be appropriated as such by collective farm chairmen eager to fulfill work requirements – and a mode of being in the world that implied epistemological and ontological orientations at odds with the Soviet notion of the social. As the following chapters will show, what happens when secularizers successfully introduce new social imaginaries without being able to eradicate the tension with the a-social dimension of religion turns out to be a fruitful question to ask about postsecular religion.

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[83] Interview notes, January 30, 2006.

Chapter 2

"Go teach:" Didactic method and affinities between atheist and religious ecclesiologies

…материальная сила должна быть опрокинута материальной же силой; но и теория становится материальной силой, когда она овладевает массами.
…material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory, too, becomes a material force when it takes hold of the masses.
(Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction. Works of Marx and Engels, 1929 Russian edition, vol. 1, p. 406)

Задача методиста – связать теорию с практикой.
The task of the methodician is to link theory with practice.
(A. V. Fomina, methodician at the Center for Folk Creativity, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Marij El, describing her job, April 22, 2005)

Итак идите, научите все народы, крестя их во имя Отца и Сына и Святаго Духа.
And so go, teach all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
(Matthew 28, 19 – Russian Synodal Bible translation)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, commissioner for religious cult affairs Nabatov did not always succeed in interesting his superiors in Moscow in the intricacies of religious life in the Mari ASSR. State and party administrative bodies in the republic also sometimes failed to consult with him when making decisions in religious matters.[1] He found a more responsive audience among intellectuals engaged in disseminating knowledge about religion, which in the post-war Soviet Union meant propagandists of

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[1] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 42 (Report from Nabatov for the fourth quarter of 1946, January 13, 1947); GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 73-74 (Report from Nabatov for the fourth quarter of 1947, January 19, 1948).

atheism. In 1950, Nabatov joined the Mari division of the All-Union Society for the

Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, and was invited to be a member of

its newly founded atheist section a few months later. He prepared the texts of several

lectures on the religious situation in the Mari ASSR for the Society and the group of

lecturers deployed by the regional party committee, albeit anonymously or under the

names of other activists, because the Council for Religious Cult Affairs prohibited its

commissioners from openly engaging in atheist propaganda.[2]

Among propagandists of atheism, Nabatov found people who had a need for

information about religious life in order to be able to teach others and ultimately

transform lives. These people, concerned with turning expert knowledge into teachable

information that would have practical effects on people's convictions and behavior,

represent a type I encountered at several points in my research: in archival documents

penned by cultural workers trying to engage people in secular, cultured behavior, and in

field encounters with Sunday school teachers, organizers of Mari sacrificial ceremonies,

and a teacher of Quranic reading. What they all had in common was a concern with

methodology as the link between facts and changed ways of life, knowledge and

behavior, theory and practice. The organizations they were part of, whether secular or

religious, took didactic interactions as a structuring principle, assigning an intrinsic value

to teaching as a transformative and mobilizing experience not only for those taught, but

also for the teachers themselves. In Marx's terms, they saw pedagogical method as the

path to making theory "take hold of the masses," and considered the grip to be firmest

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[2] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 23-23ob (Council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, May 25, 1949); GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 570, l. 125 (Council chairman Poljanskij to Nabatov, January 9, 1951); GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 443, l. 3 (Minutes of the Mari division of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, January 11, 1950); ibid., l. 118 (Minutes of July 10, 1950).

when these masses were themselves turned into teachers. This chapter explores the preoccupation with didactic method as a key to both Soviet atheist and post-Soviet religious practice, and looks at the place of teaching and learning in the "ecclesiology" of some of the groups discussed, or their doctrine about the nature of their community and the mechanisms that hold it together.

Juxtaposing atheist and religious ecclesiologies opens up questions about historical causality. Current concerns of religious groups with questions of didactic method do seem to draw on the pedagogical ideas and skills which Soviet institutions worked hard to spread among the population. But as I have shown in the introduction, judgments about historical continuities between religious and secular contexts and vice versa are often made with unwarranted ease. This gives reason to pause and think more carefully about the different types of temporal and spatial transmission that can underlie observable affinities. The second part of this chapter approaches these questions using the cell group, an organizational form favored by one of the Protestant churches in the republic, as an example of an elective affinity between Soviet and religious modes of mobilization. The affinity points to a complex history of circulating ideas, but also helps us see the paradox of power and compromise implied in any methodical approach to social transformation: it is difficult to imagine anyone more closely enmeshed in the current details of people's lives than an expert in radically transformative methods.

Soviet methodicians

In the Soviet Union, reflection on the task of turning theory into practice through pedagogical method was so highly developed that a separate profession was devoted to

this problem. The *metodist* was an expert in designing, organizing, and moderating didactic events who might be employed in the ministry of culture, the Party or Komsomol department for propaganda and agitation, a library, a museum, a culture club, or a public park. Although the equivalent in U.S. terminology might be a director of programming or events manager, I translate the term as "methodician" to preserve the connotation of someone whose expertise is in applying, developing, and disseminating ways of engaging others in self-transformative behavior. These are the people who might write and consume books and brochures with titles such as "The forms and methods of scientific-atheist propaganda" or "Forms and methods of visuality in propaganda," a genre of Soviet advice literature which proliferated in the post-war decades.

While I have found no explicit discussions of the history of the profession of *metodist*, historians have dated to the 1920s the emergence of a professional group of "festival experts," in charge of organizing mass celebrations as well as more small-scale events (Rolf 2006: 72). As we will see in this and the following chapters, these experts drew on the influence of various strands of pre-revolutionary reformist cultural pedagogy, from Wagnerians (Clark 1995) to movements for workers' education (Plaggenborg 1996), as well as on developments of these traditions in Soviet psychological and pedagogical research. Organizations of "science popularizers" (Andrews 2003), whose activism also had pre-Revolutionary precedent, also carved out an important niche in Soviet society for specialists in didactic method.

But the concern with method was not limited to people whose official job qualification was methodician, nor to professional pedagogues in schools and universities. From the literacy campaigns of the 1920s to Komsomol and party study

circles of the Brezhnev era, Soviet social life presented numerous occasions where people of all walks of life passed acquired knowledge on to others. This could happen among peers – for instance, if a member of a workplace study circle on political economy was asked to summarize the week's topic in a presentation (*doklad* or *referat*, see Kelly 2001: 274) or when the workers of a factory were encouraged to design and contribute to a wall newspaper (Kelly 2002). Or the setting could be more stratified, when someone considered to be of higher political consciousness or higher expertise was sent to work with a less enlightened audience. Examples included a teacher or university instructor lecturing at an enterprise, university students or factory workers going to the countryside to talk about the importance of upcoming elections, city women modeling modern standards of dress and hygiene to female collective farm workers, and village teachers helping the local collective farm organize a festival. Atheist propaganda occurred in both kinds of settings (fig. 2.1), and the question of method – of how to accomplish the

Figure 2.1: An amateur methodician in action. According to the caption of this press photograph, it shows the Komsomol secretary of one of Joshkar-Ola's factories, conducting "a talk with the workers on atheist topics." *Marijskaja pravda*, August 31, 1972, p. 2.

transmission of knowledge in such a way that it would affect people's behavior – arose for people engaged in collaborative self-improvement within their own collective as well as for experts delegated to elevate others to their status.

The Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge (*Obshchestvo po rasprostraneniju politicheskikh i nauchnykh znanij*) represents the more stratified approach to public pedagogy. Founded in 1947 and renamed Knowledge Society (*Obshchestvo "Znanie"*) in 1963, this association of scholars and intellectuals placed atheist propaganda in a broad context of the inculcation of "a scientific world view" among the general population. The society replaced prewar organizations involved in popularizing science and technology (TekhMass, founded in 1928, and renamed *Za Ovladenie Tekhnikoi*, "For Mastering of Technology" in 1932), but also took over the functions of atheist propaganda formally carried out by the League of the Militant Godless, active from 1925 to 1942 and formally dissolved in 1947 (Andrews 2003: 154, 165; Peris 1998: 222). The League was now condemned for crude anticlericalism and counterproductive attacks on the religious sentiments of believers (Powell 1975: 48-51).

The premise of atheist work within the Knowledge Society was that the discoveries of modern science were the most effective tools for making people abandon the false ontology and epistemology of religion. Decisions about methods for persuading people to "break ties with religion" were thus at the core of the distinctive mandate of the new organization. How to bring their points across to audiences whose educational level widely diverged from their own was also a question that came quite naturally to the

intellectuals who joined the Knowledge Society, fueling a demand for methodological guidance.[3]

Requests for such guidance were frequently voiced at conferences of the Knowledge Society, for which atheist propagandists from various parts of the Soviet Union gathered in Moscow. A representative from the Tatar ASSR at a 1956 seminar stated that methodical directions from Moscow were needed more than finished lecture texts, because members of the regional section had sufficient expertise to be able to furnish the content of lectures themselves.[4] Eight years later, a lecturer from a state farm in Moscow region expresses the same concern at a seminar for rural propaganda workers. What rural lecturers need is not information of the kind they can find in newspapers, but "such literature that would help turn people from their belief in religions for good (*okonchatel'no razuverit' v religii*). […] I say [to believers] – god does not exist, and they say to me – prove it, and I don't have any proof (*mne nechem dokazat'*)."[5]

These statements point to the role of methodical guidance in structuring relationships between centers and peripheries of Soviet mass organizations such as the Knowledge Society. As we will see in more detail in the following chapter, centers – and these could be in Moscow or in regional capitals – had to rely on local initiative, local

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[3] As with all Soviet mass organizations, membership in the Knowledge Society was officially voluntary. Unofficially, refusing to become a member might have repercussions for the career of an ambitious scholar. A scholar or teacher who was a Communist Party member might be required to join by his or her party cell because that cell had received instructions to support the efforts of the Society. That said, the Society's records contain complaints about members of the intelligentsia not joining in sufficient numbers, indicating that the pressure on these professional groups may not always have been very great (GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 190 – Stenograph of the All-Russian seminar meeting of the chairpersons of scientific-atheist and natural-scientific sections in the regional and ASSR divisions of the Society, January 10-11, 1956; GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 128, l. 19 – Stenograph of the membership meeting of the Mari division of the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, November 24, 1948; GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1377, l. 11-12 – Stenograph of an all-Union seminar on questions of aid to propaganda in rural areas, February 29, 1964).

[4] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 168.

[5] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1377, l. 34.

knowledge, and local resources for much of the day-to-day functioning of propaganda work. What local propaganda workers demanded from the center above all were ingredients that would make their own efforts produce the desired effects – the literature that would make people give up their belief in religion, the proof for god's nonexistence that would end all counterquestions.

From the point of view of the center, method was a way to exercise control through prescribing aims and providing people with instructions for attaining them, without having to provide all the resources or overseeing all steps. From the point of view of the lecturer, the concern with method arose in part out of the peculiar position of popularizing teachers toward a doctrinary orthodoxy that they had to disseminate without being able to change it. Printed lecture texts from Moscow were helpful, a natural scientist from Chita in the Far East said at the seminar in 1956, but they did not answer such basic questions as how to explain to a person with a seven-year elementary school education or less "that protein, just through its chemical potentialities, could become the primary carrier of life."[6] He recounts the plight of a lecturer who attempts to deliver a lecture with a standard narrative of the progress of science, but runs into queries not anticipated in the script:

> These questions, after all, are in need of a particular methodological format (*nuzhdajutsja v opredelennoj metodicheskoj razrabotke*) and it is here that the lecturer runs into particular problems. From Aristotle to our days the lecturer tells his story and everything works out fine, works out splendidly, here it is quite possible to bring in a certain atheist element, but the moment they start to ask you questions, - but what is protein, that is where the searching starts. Some consider it possible to say that protein consists of small particles formed by amino acids, but we have no serious methodical points of orientation.[7]

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[6] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 116.
[7] Ibid.

The dilemma of the lecturer consists in having to answer for the contradictions of official doctrine without being in a position to shape this doctrine. The question about proteins arises because of the definition of life as "the form of the existence of protein bodies" which Soviet scientists borrowed from Friedrich Engels's *Anti-Dühring* as the proper materialist explanation (Engels 1962: 75; Graham 1972: 272-273). Note that the lecturer does not challenge the definition of life with which atheist lectures operate, but simply asks for guidance on how to make that definition make sense to a lay audience. Some of the predicament grows from a context where political constraints had to be constantly tested, as indicated by the cautious formulation "Some consider it possible to say that…," and an earlier speaker's inquiry about whether or not to use the works of a particular biologist.[8] In an organization whose charter treated political *and* scientific knowledge as part of a single mandate, asking for information about the latest findings of science and testing the limits of the politically permissible could be bundled in a single question about method.

But the predicament of the popularizing lecturer is not restricted to societies with authoritarian regimes. The search for method can also be understood as part of what Theodor Adorno (1971: 75) calls "the immanent untruth of pedagogy:" the fact that its task is the circulation, not production, of knowledge. There are a number of pedagogical systems that actively seek to restrict teachers' capacity to question the underlying premises of what is being taught, be they the "teacher-proof" curricula of test preparation in contemporary U.S. schools (Collins 2003: 32) or the uniform weekly lessons studied in Seventh-Day Adventist congregations worldwide on any given Saturday (Miyazaki 2004:

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[8] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 82. The question concerned the biologist O.B. Lepeshinskaja, and whether or not to use her views on the origin of life. The answer given by the chairman of the Division for scientific-atheist propaganda of the Knowledge Society of the USSR was in the affirmative.

88). As in the discussions of the Knowledge Society, method has a curious double role in these pedagogical approaches: on the one hand, it is never treated as an end in itself, but a tool for helping didactic content circulate among diverse recipients. But with its promise of making content comprehensible and relevant to diverse audiences, method can so preoccupy the teacher that the underlying premises of what she is being asked to teach recedes into the background.

Methods in circulation

In order to be at once an unobtrusive tool and a crucial preoccupation, methods themselves have to be able to circulate. Two features of the concept of method with which the Knowledge Society operated ensured their capacity for circulation: a method had to be specific to a particular audience, but should in principle be universally applicable. Universal applicability meant first of all that the method should produce the same results no matter who applied it, provided it was applied correctly. Disappointing results could only be caused by the insufficient preparation of provincial practitioners. This was a common way of explaining the failure of universal schemes for the improvement of life in the Khrushchev era, as indicated by the analogy between a badly written lecture and badly grown corn made at the 1956 seminar, in allusion to one of Khrushchev's favorite agricultural projects, the promotion of maize as a food crop: "When we receive a lecture from one of the districts it is like a corn plant which is hardly alive in the hands of an incompetent manager."[9]

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[9] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 96. On the promotion of corn-growing during the Khrushchev era, see Nove 1982.

When correctly applied, a method should not only work independently of who was using it, it should also produce the same result in any audience of comparable social and educational background. Khrushchev- and Brezhnev-era social science discovered an increasing variety of such backgrounds and sought to design specific methods for them (see chapter 5), but the underlying idea was that human beings were so similar to one another that they would respond in the same way when given identical training and information – an idea that runs counter to some of Russia's religious traditions, as we will see later in this chapter.

A look at actual methical directives in lecture texts shows that the quest to adapt universal truths to the specifics of local life encouraged a "fill-in-the-blanks" approach to local realities. In 1962, the Mari division of the Knowledge Society reproduced 250 copies of a lecture by a historian from Joshkar-Ola, entitled "The realization of the decisions of the March plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU – the concern of the whole party, the whole people," for the use of lecturers in the rural districts. Interspersed in the text are pieces of "methodical advice to the lecturer," all of which ask the lecturer to fill in specific local information. Where the lecture text talks about the contribution of the Mari ASSR to the task of provisioning the population of the USSR with agricultural products, the lecturer is advised to "provide data on the condition of agricultural production, the plans for 1962 and the coming years in the district, collective farm, or state farm in which the lecture will be read."[10] In other places, it is recommended to insert the names of local progressive workers and enterprises, or to give

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[10] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 115, l. 64 (Lecture text by A.M. Gluzman, Joshkar-Ola 1962).

instances of assistance to agriculture by the industrial enterprise or school where the lecture is delivered.[11]

In this understanding, methods are closely linked to content: the point of methodology is to help a speaker adapt content to make it comprehensible and relevant to the intended audience. The performative genre of the lecture in which the interaction between propagandist and audience occurs remains constant. But experimenting with different genres, known as the "forms" of propaganda, had also been one of the features of Bolshevik political culture from the Civil War years onward – from mass spectacles, propaganda trains and mobile film projectors, to mock trials and innovative forms of classroom discussion (Clark 1995; David-Fox 1997; Kenez 1985; Petrone 2000; Plaggenborg 1996).

Technically, "forms" were distinct from "methods," as one speaker at a 1959 meeting of atheist propagandists reminded the audience. Forms were genres of performance common to all agitational work, while methods were specific to the content (in this case, scientific atheist) they were intended to bring across.[12] As a generalization, this statement is not entirely accurate – as the discussion below will show, there were named forms that were used exclusively to bring across atheist content, such as the "Evening of miracles without miracles." Rather, the fact that the speaker had to grope for a distinction shows how established the paired phrase "forms and methods" was. Familiar from book and seminar titles, the performative genres known as "forms" were as crucial

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[11] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 115, l. 65-66.
[12] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 283, l. 91 (Stenograph of a seminar meeting of lecturers on scientific-atheist topics, Moscow, June 15-16, 1959, comments by comrade Uskov from Moscow).

to the circulation of didactic approaches as the concrete instructions known as "methods."[13]

The demands of copying and innovation through which forms and methods proliferated calls to question the ossified nature that is often ascribed to Soviet propaganda. The constant pressure to produce quantifiable and reportable results not only produced meaningless and ill-attended events whose purpose was to impress on paper more than in reality, as historians studying the archival records of propaganda organizations have claimed (Peris 1998). It also put pressure on methodicians to use their imagination and keep informed about the work of institutions in other parts of the Soviet Union, because by reporting on inventing or copying new performance genres they could demonstrate that they were working to increase the mass appeal and effectiveness of their events. Conferences, publications, and "methodical letters"[14] were geared toward facilitating such "exchange of experience" and circulating new forms among experts. Officially encouraged copying was thus a mechanism of flexibility that helped preserve doctrinal orthodoxy while enabling a limited degree of innovation. As the requests for methodical guidance I quoted above show, provincial practitioners actually perceived the circulating instructions as new and needed.

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[13] "Forms and methods" is not the only such pair of technically distinct terms that were used as near-synonyms. Peter Kenez notes the same for "propaganda and agitation" (despite the distinction, going back to Plekhanov and Lenin, between nuanced and detailed propaganda addressed to the elites of the worker's movement and simplified, but emotionally effective agitation for the masses, Kenez 1985: 7-8). Oleg Kharkhordin (1999: 143) argues that even the terms "critique and self-critique" were used almost synonymously during the Stalinist purges, since "self-critique" often meant the critique of the shortcomings of one's collective and the naming of names of those who shared responsibility with the person making a confession. He draws attention to the fact that paired terms work well for chanting and other rhetorical uses, which may have been one of the reasons for their proliferation in the absence of a salient distinction of meaning between both terms. Alexei Yurchak also points to the rhythmicality of stock phrases of Soviet authoritative language as part of its poetic force, which was only increased by the fact that the referential meaning of many phrases was poorly defined for many users and audiences (Yurchak 2006: 78).
[14] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 113 (Methodical letter on organizing and carrying out an evening of questions and answers on scientific-atheist topics, approved by the section for scientific-atheist propaganda of the Society in the RSFSR, 1957).

Among Soviet methodicians, innovation happened on the level of forms rather than content, corroborating Alexei Yurchak's observation that late Soviet authoritative discourse was organized around an interest in performative rules rather than the referential meaning of the underlying ideology. Yurchak claims that this "performative turn" meant that there no longer was a meta-discourse in which ideological messages could be made explicit, questioned, or modified (Yurchak 2006: 74-76). But archival files show that there were controversial views about the genre of performance appropriate to the intended message. Debates about the match between performance rules and desired outcomes could thus result in a meta-discourse on ideology, focusing on its purpose and ethics rather than its content.

An example of a form that aroused controversy are the "Miracles without miracles" discussed in the introduction. The first mention I found of this demonstration of scientific experiments was in the transcript of the 1956 seminar of atheist propagandists, where chairman Khudjakov, of the section for scientific-atheist propaganda of the USSR-wide Knowledge Society, mentions having seen it performed during a seminar in Tashkent. The audience sat "holding their breath" throughout the three and a half hours of the performance, watching an astronomer, a biologist, a physicist and a chemist perform experiments. Among other things, they showed "concretely and convincingly how one form of energy turns into another."[15]

The Tashkent demonstration seems to have been an attempt to demonstrate the mastery of science over the wonders of the natural world without any direct reference to religious narratives. Khudjakov was impressed and recommended this form for use elsewhere. But the subtlety of propagating science without direct anti-religious polemics

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[15] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 194.

proved difficult to sustain. Three years later a leading atheist propagandist from Stavropol' region complained that the "Miracles" were ineffective, because audiences could fail to get the message that science and religion were incompatible and understand the demonstration of humanly produced "miracles" as confirmation "that such miracles happened, and we, supposedly, merely demonstrate their mechanism, explaining how Jesus Christ turned wine into water [sic], and our Ivanov turns water into wine."[16]

Different from Tashkent, the Stavropol' performance was aimed at showing how religious narratives of miracles masked the involvement of human agents: it is no miracle that Jesus Christ turned one sort of liquid into another, because "our Ivanov"[17] can do it too. This direct juxtaposition of science and religion created the risk that audiences would see the performance as a scientific confirmation of Biblical narrative. Criticism in higher places notwithstanding, the Stavropol' variant seems to have been the one more widely used. In the Mari ASSR, Mikhail Nekhoroshkov, a biologist from the teacher's college, traveled to the countryside with groups of students, giving atheist lectures followed by chemical demonstrations which showed how icons can be made to weep or bleed, why holy water does not become stagnant, how thunder and lightning originate, and how volcanoes erupt – the last point being the only feature without direct reference to preexisting folk beliefs in a region without tectonic activity (Nekhoroshkov 1964).

These performances were quite popular in the Mari ASSR and were carried out from at least 1961 to 1972, when recordings from a performance became the centerpiece

[16] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 283, l. 27-28.
[17] Ivanov is one of the most common Russian surnames, so the implication is that anyone can accomplish this feat.

of a radio feature.[18] But their effectiveness was not beyond dispute. In my interview with

Viktor Solov'ev, the sociologist whose work I refer to in chapter 1, he called the genre

"vulgar antireligiosity," where anticlericalism and ridiculing of religious beliefs took the

place of "elevating the level of the masses."[19] For Solov'ev, who had received specialized

training at the Institute of Scientific Atheism in Moscow, the older colleague's approach

smacked of the unrefined tactics of the League of the Militant Godless.

But the direct unmasking approach also had its persistent defenders. In response

to the critique of the "Miracles," a propagandist from Tambov speaking at the 1959

seminar pointed to the need to expose and counteract the emotional hold on believers

exercised by the "church people:"

> After all, the church people used these effects as a form for emotional impact, for
> impact on feelings. Who wouldn't be able to see that when in the church the
> words "Christ is risen" appear, they affect the national feelings, that is why we
> carry out this chemical experiment with a talk where we show that the church
> people use some experiments for a particular goal, and others for more emotional
> impact. And this is how one has to approach this question.[20]

In this argument, the point of specific "forms and methods" is no longer simply to bring

across information, but also to affect audience members emotionally, and to make them

aware of how emotions can be manipulated by less benign agents. As we will see in

chapter 7, the question of the permissible emotional impact of propaganda remained

problematic for Soviet methodicians throughout the late Soviet era.

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[18] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 161, l. 3-4 (Report from Secretary Chistjakov of the Knowledge Society to the chairman of the ideological department of the Mari regional committee of the CPSU, November 20, 1963); Sound archives of the Mari Republican Radio, Tape 810 (Antonina Aleksandrova, "Priglashaem k razgovoru," April 23, 1972).
[19] Interview notes, March 24, 2005.
[20] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 283, l. 62.

Debates on the role of emotion are an instance of a metadiscourse on the purpose and ethics of propaganda work, evident in archival materials and retrospective reflection. One former participant in Nekhoroshkov's atheist student club, now a Lutheran pastor, speculated that their emotional effect on audience and performers alike may have been the real purpose of these events. He remembered that the student atheists were well received by rural audiences, probably because people found the spectacular experiments interesting (he specifically remembered the volcano eruption) and because talented students were chosen to give musical performances in between the experiments. He himself had been asked to participate because of his talent for reciting poetry. In hindsight, his interpretation was that the performances may have been less effective in converting the believers among the audience than in confirming student propagandists in their atheist convictions – "through emotion, feelings, logic."[21]

This remark once more draws attention to the value placed on teaching in itself, as an activity which made people firm in their own convictions and ready to take over responsibility for others, in Soviet reflections on the effects of propaganda. A report on the work of the "agitator's school" in the teacher's college, written in 1960, stressed the qualities of creativity and responsibility which the students developed during their training in methods of agitation. The work of the agitators-in-training, which included an anti-religious evening with the title "What is religion, [what is] chemistry in life?," "is aimed at the development of creative initiative, self-activity (*samodejatel'nost'*), at the search for new entertaining (*uvlekatel'nye*) forms of agitational work among the population." Most students "have a serious attitude toward their work, systematically

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[21] Interview notes, January 25, 2006.

hold talks, readings, use works of fiction, illustrations, slide shows, magazines and other things."[22]

This report mentions in one breath the ethos of responsibility for one's work and technical mastery of a battery of propaganda forms. If religion worked through deception and manipulation, the Soviet educational system produced people whose scientific knowledge, combined with such personal qualities as creativity and self-responsibility, would keep them secure from such errors and help them take responsibility for others. Post-Soviet developments show that methodical skills are detachable from their atheist content, but not from the underlying ethos of teaching, showing the surprising resilience of the metadiscourse of Soviet didacticism.

Religious methodicians

During my fieldwork in religious organizations in post-Soviet Marij El, I encountered many people who would have been able to identify with the atheist propagandists' concern with method. Virtually all the religious communities I spent time in had clergy or active lay members who exemplified the didactic ethos described in the report on the agitator's school – taking responsibility and initiative in the course of striving to shape the views and behavior of others. These religious activists also shared the worries and questions of the participants of the atheist seminars – how to find a language for doctrinal truths that people would understand and that would affect their behavior. Some of them had conducted atheist propaganda themselves at an earlier point in their lives, such as the Lutheran pastor I mentioned above. Even more had training in Soviet cultural

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[22] GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, d. 495, l. 47 (Minutes of the bureau of the Joshkar-Ola city committee of the CPSU, December 2, 1960).

professions, be it as a teacher, a journalist, a methodician in a cultural institution, an artist or a musician. Aside from a few exceptions, they had not grown up in religious households and had typically taken up religious practice in the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Some former methodicians readily acknowledged that they were able to transfer the skills they had acquired in their Soviet training into their religious work. They were also recognized by those they taught as having the *habitus* of a teacher, raising particular expectations of their role in community activities. The examples of some of these people show both the success of Soviet efforts to inculcate teacherly qualities into a large part of the population and the failure of efforts to portray religion as the enemy of knowledge. The relationships these methodicians saw between different periods of their lives show some of resources offered by religious traditions for understanding the mechanisms of affinity between secular and religious spheres.

Among those people who found that their Soviet pedagogical or methodological training had served them well in religious work was another Lutheran, a woman born in 1968 who graduated from the foreign language department of the teacher's college and now served as a Sunday school teacher and translator. She claimed that "the methodology for foreign language teaching and Sunday school are the same," and that her training for work with children helped her in her new duties.[23] The coordinator of courses for Sisters of Mercy organized by the Orthodox diocese, herself a retired instructor from the teacher's college, found that it was quite easy to find physicians willing and able to teach basic medical skills to the sisters, because during the Soviet period all physicians had

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[23] Taped interview, July 6, 2003.

been required to "carry knowledge to the people" and give public education lectures.[24] A

retired childcare worker now leading a Baptist Bible study had been the propagandist in

charge of political education sessions in her work collective. She stated that this

experience had helped her learn the skill of gathering information on a specific topic and

adapting it to the understanding of her audience.[25]

As I have argued elsewhere, religious work in post-Soviet Russia is among a

limited number of areas where people can "recycle" the didactic skills they acquired in

Soviet cultural work in ways that allows them to make a modest living while preserving

values of economic disinterestedness and service to others (Luehrmann 2005a). The

religious traditions involved offered different ways to resolve the moral quandary

associated with such a change of allegiance. Among the centrally determined topics the

Baptist Bible study leader had covered as part of her former duties as a propagandist were

atheist ones – she specifically remembered making a wall newspaper entitled "Sticky

spider's web," devoted to the evils of religion and sectarianism.[26] Whenever she

mentioned this aspect of her past, she asked God's forgiveness in an aside – "Forgive me,

Lord, for this disgrace (*bezobrazie*)." But as a believer in the salvation of God's elect, she

also maintained that her previous work had been part of a divine plan to prepare her for

the church work she was doing now.

The Lutheran deacon introduced in chapter 1, a trained journalist and also a well-

known writer of Mari-language fiction, seemed to have an even stronger sense of the

functional and moral equivalence of his work through all periods of life. It was difficult,

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[24] Interview notes, April 17, 2005. The phrase "carry knowledge to the people" (*nesti znanija narodu*) was the slogan of the Knowledge Society.
[25] Interview notes, June 24, 2003.
[26] Interview notes, April 5, 2005.

he admitted, to travel to schools now and speak about Lutheranism when people knew that he "used to speak about other things" (first as a Komsomol official, then as the editor of the youth newspaper of the republic). But really, he added, he was still speaking about the same thing, about good, just that then he was "without God." But he felt "as if he, the Lord, had prepared me all my life – that may be putting it too grandly – for this work. Because now I feel at ease before an audience, I have all the skills, I know how to communicate, and people see me, understand me, accept me, listen to me." Through his study in a boarding school for artistically gifted children, he had learned singing and the skills of design (*oformlenie*) and calligraphy (*pocherk*) necessary for making hand-paint posters. "What God gave, that's what I'm using now, only now, so late, but God knows when it is time. Back then, maybe, I didn't have the life experience to talk to people, God knows better after all."[27] When I later told this man about my archival research with the records of the Knowledge Society, he said that although it was certainly bad that the Society conducted atheist propaganda, in principle its lecturers did good work by "carrying knowledge to the people," and that it was a pity that no one was going to the villages with lectures any more.[28]

The Tatar woman teaching courses in Quranic reading to women in Joshkar-Ola's mosque had a somewhat different biography from these retired professionals, but like them, she had once done cultural work within a Soviet bureaucracy. Born in 1942, she was the daughter of a war widow who could not afford to keep her in school beyond sixth grade, which forced her to give up her dream of becoming a teacher and work in a factory instead. As a worker, she became active in the trade union and described herself as being

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[27] Taped interview, July 3, 2003.
[28] Field notes, December 28, 2005.

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so conscientious that she even refused to join the Communist Party because she preferred to be a communist in her heart rather than use party membership to receive a career boost. Her task in the trade union was to organize *samodejatel'nost'* – literally self-activity, meaning amateur concerts put together by collectives of workers to entertain their coworkers on festive occasions or to enter into competitions with others. This places her among the amateur methodicians into whose training and supervision late Soviet organizations invested significant efforts and resources.

Quite in line with the ideal of elevation through self-activity, this factory worker had acquired an authoritative demeanor which people in the mosque community recognized as the habitus of a teacher. One of her students and the woman who ran the mosque store both told me that she had been a teacher all her life. She also shared with a Soviet-era teacher a high esteem for knowledge, but did not place it in contrast to blind religious faith as a lecturer of the Knowledge Society might have done. For this Quranic teacher, the transition between her secular and religious careers was marked by the acquisition of knowledge about Islam – she had had "faith" all her life, she said, but no "knowledge," and it was only the time spent at a medrese in Kazan' after retirement that enabled her to acquire whatever insufficient authority she now had to teach others.[29]

Not everyone saw a moral break between cultural and religious work. The director of the culture club in the village of Shin'sha, who chaired the local chapter of Mari Ushem, a Mari cultural organization with a mildly nationalist political agenda, had taken the initiative to revive Mari sacrificial ceremonies in her village. These had not been publicly conducted since the sacred grove was appropriated for use in the secular

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[29] Taped interview, March 23, 2005.

festival <u>Peledysh pajrem</u> (fig. 2.2).[30] Tellingly, the club director used the language of Soviet cultural administration when talking about the revival of religious ceremonies in the grove: "I asked the administration not to hold these mass events there, but, so to speak, to renew the work which was carried out before (*kotoraja provodilas' ran'she*), to clean the prayer grove."[31] By using the verb *provodit'* (to carry out), whose subject is typically an official bureaucracy, the director assimilated ceremonies to such other forms of "cultural work" as mass festivals, classes offered in the club, or youth discos. Using another expression from Soviet centralized networks of continuing education, she

Figure 2.2: <u>Peledysh pajrem</u> in the former sacred grove of Shin'sha village, ca. 1970s. In this family photograph, the headscarves worn even by the young women who are not in traditional Mari costume seem to suggest some sense of entering a sacred space even for this intentionally secular holiday. Photograph from private collection, used with permission.

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[30] While I have found no archival records to date this use of the grove, it must have started around the time of the republic-wide official revival of this festival in 1965.

[31] Taped interview, May 23, 2005.

recalled identifying some potential priests and sent them to study in the capital with the High Priest of the republic "through the line of Mari Ushem" (*po linii* Mari Ushem).

While she made attempts to defer to the expertise of the "grandmothers" whose memories of past ceremonies she collected, the club director found that the villagers accepted the ceremony as one more kind of "event" which it was her job to organize. After having organized a ceremony on St. Peter's day[32] (July 12) for the first time in 2001, she had expected that next year the grandmothers would themselves take the initiative. But as July approached, people started asking her why there weren't any posters with announcements similar to those she had put up the previous year – "so there won't be St. Peter's day this year?" Again using a phrase associated with newly created Soviet festivals, the director stated that the ceremony on St. Peter's day was still "entering into tradition" (*vkhodit v traditsiju*).

If culture and religion seemed to merge easily for the club director, this may not have been the case for all villagers. One of the old women of the village (to whom I was introduced by younger relatives who considered her an expert on Mari traditional religion) told me that if I wanted to know about the sacrificial ceremonies, I should ask the club director.[33] If old women accepted the much younger club director's role as organizer of the ceremony, this may indicate either that culture and religion were not opposed for them, or that the association with culture so changed the event that they did not recognize it as the same ceremony that was conducted in their youth. Two younger women living in Shin'sha told me that there were old people who refused to attend the

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[32] Technically, SS Peter and Paul's Day, in Mari Petro pajrem, in Russian *Petrov den'*. While this is a feast day of the Orthodox Christian calendar, Maris have appropriated St. Peter as Petro jumo (the god Peter). It has been common for Mari villages in the southeastern parts of the republic to hold sacrificial ceremonies on important Orthodox feast days since the nineteenth century (Kalinina 2003).
[33] Field notes, April 9, 2005.

ceremonies because they thought that the grove had been irredeemably desecrated by the Soviet secular holidays.

While such reservations may well have existed in other places as well, I encountered the staff of culture clubs and schools at work in village ceremonies in various parts of the republic: as assistants of the priest during the ceremony or as people who talked the collective farm chairman into donating animals for sacrifice and who organized the villagers into cleaning up the sacred grove before the ceremony.[34] If villagers expect the involvement of cultural workers in ceremonies, this indicates that they have come to accept a crucial part of the Soviet social imaginary: that of a village community created through the mobilizing efforts of the cultural workers. The expectation that cultural workers should be involved in organizing religious ceremonies shows most of all that these ceremonies are understood by analogy with other mobilizing events.

All these methodicians drew on theological resources to conceptualize the relationship between their former and current work. For the Protestants, the idea of instantaneous salvation through conversion made their pre-conversion past morally neutral, enabling them to treat it as a source of skills that posed no threat to their current standing in the church. The Quranic teacher expressed more regret at not having fulfilled her obligations as a Muslim through much of her life (see chapter 8), but her previous lack of knowledge and young age functioned as an alleviating factor. For those villagers who accepted the sacrificial ceremony as a method for creating community cohesion,

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[34] Such clean-up efforts were referred to as *subbotnik* (from *subbota*, Saturday), the term used for the voluntary-compulsory extra work days which Soviet work collectives were often asked to put in to meet production targets or help their city prepare for a holiday or anniversary date. In post-Soviet Marij El, the term *subbotnik* was not only surviving in a religious context, but in general the practice of organizing workers and school children for city clean-up and embellishment was still very much in use.

there was no moral problem in the transition between sacred grove, festival ground, and back. But at least some villagers apparently thought that replicating the correct actions did not make up for the spoiled sacred place. Russian Orthodox theology presents even more challenges to method's assumption of the primacy of standardized action over the inner qualities of people or places.

Method and anti-method

The Russian Orthodox Church also recognizes teachers and cultural workers as key links to making religion matter in social life, but keeps more of an institutional distance. The Mari diocese organizes a yearly joint conference with the Ministry of Education on topics of religion and morality in upbringing. The 2005 conference was held under the title "Secular education and spiritual-moral traditions of Russia." The archbishop required all priests of the diocese to attend, and each of them brought a group of teachers from their parish to the republic's capital. Seeing the small busses parked around the Socio-Political Center (formerly owned by the Communist Party and known as House of Political Enlightenment) was a reminder of the cultural power wielded by the church through such modest, but significant resources. Some parishes owned their own bus, others had access to busses owned by the district or village administration, and being able to offer teachers an outing to Joshkar-Ola at a time of low salaries and rising prices of public transportation was likely to make an impression.

As during Mari ceremonies in the villages, culture, education and religion coexisted quite successfully. Unlike chimarij Paganism, the Orthodox Church had an institutional structure of its own and was able to partially set the agenda of its relationship

with state institutions. The <u>chimarij</u> High Priest of Marij El recognized his greater dependence on public institutions when he complained to me about a research program on folk Orthodoxy at the republic's Research Institute for Language, Literature and History. There are theological seminaries to conduct research on Russian Orthodoxy, he said, let the Mari Research Institute study the Mari religion.[35]

The church's attempts to harness the social power of pedagogy notwithstanding, the ideas about personhood and community behind the Soviet understanding of method are quite alien to Orthodox ecclesiology and anthropology. It was from Orthodox clergymen that I heard the most pronounced skepticism against a methodical approach to religious practice, helping me understand some of the assumptions built into the enthusiasm about methods I encountered elsewhere.

This skepticism existed even among clergy whose backgrounds were similar to those "religious methodicians" I discussed above. The parish priest of one of the district centers had formerly been an instructor at the College for Cultural Enlightenment (*Kul'tprosvetuchilishche*, renamed College of Culture – *Kolledzh Kul'tury* – in the 1990s). Several of his parishioners made a positive link between the fact that he was "a former cultural worker" and his qualities as a priest: he was well-educated and articulate (*gramotnyj*), and he had a good voice and clear diction, making his services impressive and easy to follow. He even used a very didactic – and Soviet – simile in his Easter sermon, saying "We should come to church as to a school, but instead we treat it as a House of Everyday Life."[36] The House of Everyday Life (*Dom byta*) in a Soviet city was a center for services such as hairdressers, watchmakers, repairs for household appliances,

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[35] Interview notes, February 3, 2006.
[36] Notes on Easter sermon, May 1, 2005.

and other everyday needs of the population, often mutating into a department store in post-Soviet times. Although the exhortation not to treat the house of worship as a place of consumption has New Testament roots, the positive image in the Biblical passages is not a school, but a "house of prayer."[37] In his sermonic discourse, this priest was thus willing to accord a moral weight to the school that is very reminiscent of Soviet didactic discourse. But when I interviewed him, he decisively denied that his training in cultural work was useful for what counted most about church service:

> Q: Some of your parishioners told me, our *batjushka*[38] is a former cultural worker, that is why he has, his diction is good, everything is easy to understand – do you think that your worldly education has given you anything for church work, or are those totally different things?
> A: I think it hinders me. Because spiritual education[39] is different. The foundation, if it is the one I received – I after all received a Marxist-Leninist foundation. Philosophy, economics, political economy, scientific communism, and atheism, scientific atheism. But it is a surprising thing, it strengthens me still more in my faith in God. Knowing all that, knowing these things, knowing psychology, social psychology, that strengthens me still more in my faith. In this sense, yes, it helps. But for the service it only hinders me.
> Q: And for the service, well, for the service in the church in your view, what is the most necessary quality in a person?
> A: To be without sin yourself. If I were totally without sin, if I never sinned, if I were pure of heart, that is, everything would be a hundred times better. A hundred times better. The most important thing is not the word, the most important thing is personal example, personal life, everything, everything. People feel this from far away. A saint can be felt from far away. And my goal, as of all Orthodox people, is to draw close to saintliness, draw close to God, that is the goal.[40]

Another Orthodox parish priest – this one a former instructor of agricultural engineering – gave an equally anti-methodical answer when I asked how he would explain to a person who worshiped in both Mari prayer groves and Christian churches that these were not the

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[37] Matthew 21, 12-13; Luke 19, 45-46.
[38] Literally, "little father" – an affectionately respectful term of address for an Orthodox priest.
[39] *Dukhovnoe obrazovanie*, i.e. the education given in a theological seminary or other ecclesiastical educational institution, as opposed to the term *mirskoe obrazovanie*, which I had used to ask about his secular, or literally "worldly education."
[40] Taped interview, May 11, 2005.

same thing. There is no way to explain this, he said. If someone does not see in the heart what stands behind the outwardly similar practices, that person cannot be made to see it.[41]

In both cases, the priests evaded my attempt to speak about such methodical skills as diction and persuasive argumentation by directing the conversation to the inner qualities of a person, be it the one who is teaching or the one who is learning. Instead of assuming universally applicable methods, they insisted that the best mastery of methods would fail if the person applying them or the person on whom they were used lacked certain qualities and dispositions. In the reverse, if these qualities were present, the specific methods applied were secondary. The qualities in question were not necessarily innate, but could be acquired – the cultural worker-turned-priest speaks of life as a process of "drawing close to saintliness," the other priest alludes to the freedom of will a person is assumed to have in Orthodox theology, according to which a person cannot be made to see a spiritual truth, but can gradually come to appreciate it out of the inclination of their own heart. But the process of acquisition here is different from following a series of steps or a set of "methodical instructions." Rather, it requires a process of self-fashioning through discipline that potentially takes a lifetime, where the goal is to become a new kind of person rather than a bearer of skills. This is why the cultural-worker-turned-priest laments the wrong "foundation" he has received in his personal development and the time he has lost pursuing other goals, and why he says that his secular education "hinders" him in his church service.

The swiftness and conviction with which these priests repudiated my attempts to engage in the sorts of conversations that I was coming to take for granted from archival readings and interactions with members of other denominations brought into focus some

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[41] Interview notes, January 1, 2006.

of the social assumptions underlying Soviet didactic discourse. The idea of the learning

process as a stimulus to which everyone would respond in a similar way relies on

assumptions about the essentially similar make-up of each human being, which Louis

Dumont has identified as a feature of modern individualism. The contrasting idea that

people are qualitatively different from each other – whether by birth or by long,

disciplined development – and for that reason complement each other in different tasks is

among the features of Dumont's depiction of hierarchical society that make it so alien to

modern social imaginaries (Dumont 1966). The priestly ideal that several Orthodox

clergymen and laypeople described – of a saintly hermit in a remote rural location

endowed with powers of prophecy and second sight, by whose prayers any miracle was

possible – had very little in common with the equalizing impulse of the Knowledge

Society's quest to make as many people as possible into teachers.[42]

Involved here are different visions of personhood, but also different visions of the

foundation and dynamics of a community, each bringing with them certain values of

temporality and scale: Soviet methods, like the ones used by churches oriented toward

growth through evangelizing, are designed to be transmissible in short training sessions

in order to produce the many lecturers, study circle leaders, and methodicians needed to

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[42] Contemporary Russian Orthodox believers often refer to the nineteenth-century *startsy* as the perfect embodiment of this ideal of saintliness. *Startsy* were monks living in withdrawal from worldly affairs, who attracted a large following of pilgrims and were often considered to have spiritual gifts such as second sight or the power to work miracles by their prayers (Treadgold 1978: 38). Like the earlier incarnation of the holy man described by Peter Brown (1971), the *starets* corresponds to Dumont's type of the extraworldly individual (Dumont 1983), characteristic of India, the Hellenic world, and early Christianity, to be gradually replaced by the innerworldly individual in the course of western church history, and most fully through the Reformation in the sixteenth century. As charismatic figures the Russian *startsy* can wield an influence that goes far beyond their formal standing in the church hierarchy, and they are sometimes viewed with suspicion by the leadership of the Orthodox Church (Mitrokhin 2004). But, at least in their conversations with me as a heterodox Christian, the priests and lay believers I spoke to referred to such saintly hermit monks and ascetic priests as evidence for the overall holiness of the Orthodox Church as a community, quite in line with the hierarchical principle that the whole community was sanctified by cherishing the saintly people in its midst and benefiting from their intercession.

reach as ever-growing parts of the population quickly. The events organized by these specialists in methods had to be structured so as to mobilize mass audiences. Communities exist in and through such mobilizations and are thus more like the modern publics discussed by analysts of the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas 1965; Warner 2002) than the timeless whole that precedes any of its parts of the hierarchical imaginary. It is no coincidence that the club director I interviewed in Shin'sha contrasted the Soviet-era "mass festivals" (*massovye prazdniki*) to "religious festivals" (*religioznye prazdniki*). Religious rituals in a village might draw as many people as a Soviet "mass" festival, but they do not constitute their public through the number of individuals they attract – one member of a family might attend, for instance, and fulfill duties for relatives. The same principle of hierarchical complementarity applies to Orthodoxy, as it was understood by lay believers I spoke to in Marij El and also in Church doctrine.

Different from the interchangeability of the individuals gathered in a mass public, Orthodox ecclesiology contains a strong doctrine of the church as a hierarchy, where people are endowed with different capacities for attaining divine truths and have distinctive roles to play in order to obtain common salvation. In the words of Hermann Goltz, interpreting the *corpus aeropagiticum*, the anonymous but influential body of work of a sixth-century theologian, hierarchy is "interlocking celestial and terrestrial order," representing "the ideal (final) condition, which divine philanthropy has instituted for the salvation of fallen human *physis*." In this social order, the capacity to see divine truths is "deflected" through the descending ranks, "adapted to the respective intelligences in their greater or lesser perfection" (Goltz 1974: 148). The church as an

institution offers participation in this divine order, but without the expectation that every member will be able to be a teacher and transmitter of divine truths.

The primacy of the institution over its individual members that this implies is expressed in a post-Soviet history of the Russian Orthodox Church's tribulations under the early Soviet regime. The author, a Russian Orthodox priest, argues that the compromises made by the Moscow Patriarchate with the Bolsheviks starting in 1923 were a sacrifice made by the hierarchy of that time (at the cost of compromising their own integrity) for the sake of preserving the institutionalized ritual life of the Orthodox Church in a situation where most of its flock had abandoned it. In this view, what mattered was to preserve the church as a transhistorical entity "for the children, for the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren of those who had now abandoned the church hierarchy" (Mitrofanov 2002: 295). Again, the institution has an existence and a value apart from its ability to mobilize and educate members.

But however eternal the church is imagined to be, it must still be animated in its living members. In my fieldwork, I found that what took the place of public mobilization in this church community were what Goltz calls "hierarchical actions:" blessings (which are given by someone higher in the hierarchy to someone lower down, for instance by a priest to a layperson or a mother to her children), mutual intercessory prayer, and virtuous that people did for each other's benefit. When I joined a group of predominantly elderly women who helped clean the floor of Joshkar-Ola's Russian Orthodox cathedral after mass one Sunday, an action said to procure forgiveness of sins, one of the women said that she would be doing this for her grandchildren as long as she could, then at some point they would have to do it for her.

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Of course, it is hard for contemporary Orthodox clergy to completely ignore the promises of method for revitalizing community life, and I will discuss in chapters 5 and 6 how methodical thinking is influencing Orthodox understandings of images and liturgy. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to show some of the more extreme consequences of using didactic method as a basis for social mobilization, consequences which might help to understand some of the reticence of Orthodox clergy about method. Having repudiated hierarchies based in inherent qualities, Soviet mass organizations and Protestant churches share the dilemma of assuming basic equality between all members and yet wanting to maintain more or less centralized leadership. In Soviet organizations, a network of teacher-student relationships governed by methodical directives from the center restrained the mobilized publics from moving into unwanted directions. When post-Soviet Protestants use didactic skills to mobilize communities in similar ways, one may suspect that they have inherited the manipulative as well as the liberatory potentials of Soviet social imaginaries. But ecclesiological models where strong authority is derived from didactic relationships also come to post-Soviet spaces from elsewhere, not necessarily out of the Soviet past.

Church cells, party cells, and monastic cells

One of several Protestant churches that sprang up in Joshkar-Ola in the first half of the 1990s is the Christian Center, founded as a mission project of a Charismatic church in Beaumont, Texas. A missionary from that church conducted services and Bible studies in rented auditorium space from 1993 onward, and donations from Texas eventually helped buy the building of the disused cinema "*Mir*" (Peace) in the southeastern part of the city.

Although its membership was small (less than 50 people attended Sunday services on average during the time of my fieldwork), this church epitomized everything that seemed wrong with Protestantism to city officials and Orthodox clergy: it was aggressively and loudly evangelizing, without respect for pre-existing Christian traditions or established religious-ethnic boundaries, and its worship style and funding appeared to come from abroad. But the popular appellation "the American Center" notwithstanding, by the time of my fieldwork the church maintained only loose connections to its American founders. The last American pastor had not been able to return due to visa problems in 2002, and the current pastor was a young Russian from Joshkar-Ola who had joined the church as a teenager, spent a few years in Moscow after graduating from university, and returned in 2004 at the request of the American pastor. In Moscow, he had received no formal theological training, but had served and studied at a church named "Triumphant Zion," a mission of the "Embassy of God" in Kiev, a megachurch founded by the Nigerian Sunday Adelaja. The young pastor of the Christian Center maintained spiritual and educational bonds with Pastor Aleksandr Dzjuba of "Triumphant Zion" and through him with Adelaja, and sought to organize his church according to their model.

Much of this model was concerned with making relationships of spiritual learning and teaching into structural principles of church growth. As Charismatic Protestants, the members of the Christian Center believe that repentance and grace are sufficient for salvation, but that a Christian will reap even greater earthly and heavenly rewards for a life of service to God's kingdom. In order to become fit for service, two things are necessary: receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (manifesting itself in the gift of praying in tongues), and improving oneself through study and spiritual discipline. In this

spiritual discipline, the Embassy of God and its affiliate churches emphasize the need to obtain God's blessing through human intermediaries endowed with spiritual and social authority. A junior pastor at Triumphant Zion whom I interviewed in Moscow stated that it was the mission of Triumphant Zion to offer the "apostolic protection" of Pastor Sunday to the many churches in Russia that, like the Christian Center, had been founded by western missionaries and then left to their own devices. "It is good when a church has one apostolic protection, and this protection constantly watches, watches over (*bljudet*) the growth of the church, the development of the church. That makes for healthy growth of the church." Western missionaries had not inculcated the same understanding of the importance of spiritual authority: "Thanks to them for planting churches, but they didn't give them moral training (*ne vospitali*)."[43]

In order to institutionalize spiritual protection at all levels, Triumphant Zion promoted a model for church growth that all involved considered to be coming from the West, although again the claim was that its American popularizers did not necessarily grasp its full spiritual significance. Under the "G-12" or "cell church" principle, twelve church "leaders" (known in Russian by the Anglicism *lidery*) receive teachings directly from the pastor and pass them on to members of small prayer groups with which each leader meets once a week. Each member of such a "cell group" (*jachejka*) or "house group" (*domashnjaja gruppa*) is in turn encouraged to find his or her own "disciples" (*ucheniki*) either among less experienced or less active church members or among the unconverted, who should thereby be drawn into the church. Once a group reaches more than twelve members – the number of Jesus's disciples and, as the young pastor at the Christian Center explained to me, the maximum number of students to which any teacher

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[43] Taped interview, December 8, 2005.

can really transmit everything that teacher knows. Toward the end of my fieldwork, the Christian Center was still struggling to move to the "G-12" principle from a less strictly numerically defined set of house groups that met on Tuesday nights in various parts of the city.

Cell groups at the Christian Center were in many ways reminiscent of Soviet forms of study circles, but the complex network of international circulation through which the form had come to Joshkar-Ola shows how deceptive such resemblances can be. Early during my fieldwork I was invited to attend the house group that met in the church building itself, attended by approximately eight longstanding members who lived close by. Based on experiences with small groups in other Protestant churches, I had expected the group to be engaged primarily in Bible study. But at the first meeting I attended the group members, after an opening prayer and some chatting over tea and cookies, all took out the notes they had taken on last Sunday's sermon, and proceeded to discuss what the pastor had been trying to tell them in his sermon on the topic of "The foundation of your victory." The discussion followed the Bible verses that had been part of the sermon, ranging from the story of King David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) to a verse from the epistles saying that God judges without reference to the person, but by the deeds of each (1 Peter 1, 17). The focus was on understanding the pastor's intention in grouping the passages together, and on making decisions about applying the sermon's message to one's life. The group leader (a woman in her forties who taught English at the technical university) injected particular quotes from the sermon into the discussion in order to illuminate the pastor's core points about the need for constant vigilance against falling into sin: "he [the pastor] several times pronounced the following phrase: When Jesus

died, God did not take off the robe of the judge," and "[the pastor] already said several times: flies don't land on a hot skillet."[44]

The group referred to this activity as *razbirat' propoved'*, taking apart the sermon, using terminology familiar from Soviet and post-Soviet education. There, *razbirat' temu*, taking apart the topic, meant a presentation and discussion of the "topic" of the day's lesson according to the curriculum. The participatory structure of such a lesson – based on student presentations and joint discussion rather than lecture and rote learning – is akin to the study circles (*kruzhki*) and seminars which Russian socialists had developed in exile in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and brought with them into the Soviet educational institutions founded in the 1920s (David-Fox 1997: 122, 170). At least by the Khrushchev era, the "questions" engaged by the class were set in a centrally determined curriculum and textbooks. The following excerpt from an evaluation conducted in 1960 of the study circle on political economy attended by staff and faculty of the Polytechnical Institute in Joshkar-Ola gives a taste of the method:

> Left over from the last class meeting was the question: "the role of banks in socialist society." They took apart that question (*Razobrali etot vopros*), but without bringing in new material. They started a new topic: "Socialist reproduction and national income." They took apart the questions: 1) The essence of socialist reproduction. 2) The gross social product. The participants were prepared for the lesson within the bounds of the textbook on polit-economy. […] The passivity of the leader manifested itself in the fact that he underestimates introductory words, asking the participants "what question is left from the last class?" and "please present" (*pozhalujsta vystupajte*).[45]

When I asked other members of the Christian Center what they did in their house groups, *razbirat' propoved'* and "sharing the revelations" each had received while listening to the

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[44] Field notes, April 26, 2005.
[45] GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, d. 506, l. 107 (Tarasova, information about a visit to the study circle on political economy, for the party bureau of the Maksim Gor'kij Polytechnical Institute, January 28, 1960).

sermon (*delit'sja otkrovenijami*) was among the common answers, along with drinking

tea, talking about each person's problems and praying. When I interviewed the pastor of

the Christian Center, I asked him about this practice of studying the sermon. He replied

that this was due to the "idea of discipleship":

> It's about the thoughts that, for example, I think that God wishes that they would
> start working in the church. For example, I see that God takes the pastor to lead in
> a certain direction. And in order to lead, a word is necessary (*neobkhodimo slovo*),
> that is we need to know where we are going, are we going in the right direction or
> not. For that reason, we take a particular topic, each month is distinguished by a
> particular topic. Every sermon has its topic within the framework of this big given
> topic. And so that the people could also move in that direction (*mogli v etom
> napravlenii tozhe dvigat'sja*), for that reason they take apart the sermon. But there
> is nothing so strict about this that all would have to subscribe to the thoughts that *I*
> say. They can bring in their own when they discuss it, that means there is a topic
> which is given, but the foundation in any case for all discussions is the Bible, it is
> the priority, the authority. The pastor can err, that's for sure. So sometimes even
> people can give advice, say that something is wrong. That is normal. That is what
> the Protestant movement consists of, that everyone has his opinion. But some kind
> of order needs to exist, and some kind of basic direction has to be given by the
> pastor, and discipleship needs to be maintained, I think, on all levels. But again,
> there should be freedom, just there should not be extremes in either direction.[46]

This ideal of everyone moving in the same direction through common study of the

current topic sounds much like the rationale behind the study circles devoted to "taking

apart" the decisions of the latest party congress that were held in the system of

Communist Party political education during the Soviet era.[47] The authoritarian

didacticism with which this church was run might thus appear to be a post-Soviet

compromise with the Protestant idea of the congregation as a voluntary association of

individuals responsible for their own beliefs, or, in the pastor's words, a reconciliation of

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[46] Taped interview, May 16, 2005.
[47] For instance, GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, d. 506, l. 105-105 ob. (Information on a visit to the study circle on "current politics" in the Joshkar-Ola dendrarium, no date, ca. 1960) describes a lesson devoted to the "Results of the December plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1959)."

the principle that "everyone has his own opinion" with the reluctance to give up "some kind of order" and a common "basic direction." If we look at the claims about the history of Soviet study circles made by political scientist Oleg Kharkhordin, we even find that he traces the same kinds of authoritarian collectives back to Russian Orthodox traditions. Kharkhordin argues that the Soviet collective as theorized by Stalin-era pedagogue Anton Makarenko, with its "relations of responsible dependency" and practices of mutual evaluation (Kharkhordin 1999: 91), represents a distinctive Soviet path to self-fashioning, different from the introspective practices of western Europe. Drawing on Foucault's work on the importance of the private confession common in Catholic Europe for European technologies of subject-formation, Kharkhordin argues that Orthodox monastic practices of public penance and collective "unmasking" – *oblichenie* – had a similar impact on Russian and Soviet selves (Kharkhordin 1999: 228). If we were to follow him in this argument, party cells would be a secularized version of Orthodox monastic communities, while Protestant church cells would be a newly theologized version of the same.

The problem is that all the features of collective responsibility and mutual surveillance that might be seen of reminiscent of communist and perhaps even Orthodox practices of collectivized self-fashioning are already contained in the model of the cell church as it comes to Russia from western Christendom and its extensions in the global south. The pastor himself named two inspirations for cell groups in his church, the church of Yonggi Cho in South Korea and Brazilian churches organized along the G-12 principle. Literature on church organization sold in the Christian Center and in those churches in Moscow it was connected with was written by U.S.-based authors. For instance, a Russian translation of Larry Stockstill's "The Cell Church" (2001 [1998]) was

for sale in the Word of Life church in Moscow, whose classes and events several members of the Christian Center attended on visits to the capital.

Stockstill, pastor of a megachurch in Colorado, describes cell groups as the ideal organizational structure of a large, growth-oriented church because they serve several crucial functions simultaneously. As small groups meeting according to a centrally coordinated timetable and with leaders who report back to the pastor, they make possible personal "ministry to each member of the Body of Christ," as the subtitle of Stockstill's book proclaims, while realizing the principle of "flexibility and accountability" (Stockstill 2001: 136; see also Hornsby 2000; Hurston 2001). As places where members can invite their unconverted friends and to which newly converted church members are referred, they serve as tools for evangelizing and retention of new members, and thus as instruments for church growth. Because of the expectation that members of a group will eventually become leaders of their own cell when existing groups grow and split, the cells also serve the "formation of leaders," who move up over the steps of "preaching, pastorhood, preparation and planting" (110). Reminiscent of Kharkhordin's analysis of individuation through collective evaluation, it is the cell's responsibility to "analyze the spiritual gifts of its members, to help them take their place in the church" (34). For content of the weekly meetings, Stockstill recommends the same mix of socializing, prayer for individual needs, discussion of the week's sermon and development of service projects that was practiced in Joshkar-Ola, and he even explains the need to focus on discussion of the sermon as a restraint against rival ideas:

> One way to avoid the emergence of false teachings in the cells is to EXCLUDE ALL TEACHING from them! All our house groups are built on discussions led by a leader, not a lecturer. Whoever comes to the cell in order to present his

newest doctrine on the end of time or on freedom of conscience won't find any opportunity for himself there. As pastor, I organized extra lessons on the topic of the sermon of the Sunday service, so that the members of a cell had rich food for discussion of the teaching during the lesson as well as in the cell meeting. (154)

Stockstill's book and descriptions of cell groups in Latin America and South Korea (D. Martin 1990: 143-144, 2002: 13) show that the function of mutual surveillance can accrue to the cell group in a variety of historical contexts. It seems to go along with the group's mandate to provide a face-to-face community in a fast-growing organization. Members of Triumphant Zion and the Christian Center believed themselves to be emulating western models of church organization rather than perpetuating Soviet methods of social control. At the same time, the leadership of both churches taught that the Americans who had brought the cell model had failed to grasp the full spiritual significance of the deferential teacher-student-relationships involved in them.

For example, when Aleksandr Dzjuba from Triumphant Zion visited the Christian Center in September 2005 as the main preacher at a revivalist conference, he dwelled at length on the connection between relations of authority and deference within a church and the success of its efforts to evangelize its surroundings, and often pointed to the shortcomings of American-derived teachings in making this connection clear. Part of the problem was that Americans practiced too paternalistic a relationship to those under their tutelage, teaching them dependence rather than self-reliance. Commenting on the state of the ceiling of the former cinema in which the church met, Dzjuba made a point about the way in which American aid had exacerbated one of Russia's main spiritual problems, laziness:

Don't count on me, I have enough work in Moscow. There you'd never guess in how many buildings we have to change the ceilings, there are such incredible ceilings there! You have to develop here. You have to change your way of thinking today, your approach to life. God will raise *you* up. Praise God for the Americans, but they did too little, in the sense that they didn't teach. Thank God that they acquired us for faith, but they didn't teach us to think. They didn't teach us to stand for ourselves, they did everything for us. They buy us equipment! May God bless them. But *God* will bless them, and what will *we* do for them? [Exclamations of "Ah, yes!" from the audience][48]

The second problem was that Americans did not understand the importance of deferential relationships. Dzjuba's preaching against American legacies included going against the first-name address and use of the familiar "*ty*" which American pastors had popularized in the church. The young pastor should be called "Pastor Sergej" and addressed with the formal "vy," instead of in the diminutive-familiar "Serezha" and "ty." Church leaders and administrators should be addressed by first name and patronymic in the usual Russian way of expressing respect for elders. During the final Sunday service of his visit, Dzjuba asked the congregation if they had benefited from the teachings of two praise-and-worship musicians who had accompanied him from Moscow. "Yes? Then you have to be thankful to them." It was important, he stressed, to find ways to incline people towards the church so that they would come back. "I know that the Americans did not teach that, but we are in Russia now, it is time to return to natural life."[49]

On a deeper level, Dzjuba's critique of American Charismatics was that they failed to see that the spiritual and material awakening of a society could only come about through disciplined churches whose members cultivated the right relationship to teachers

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[48] Taped sermon, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 10, 2005.

[49] Tape of service, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 11, 2005. By implying that there is something quintessentially Russian about inclining relatively more powerful people toward oneself, Dzjuba is referring to the complex of practices known as *blat*, or obtaining access to goods and services through personal relationships (Ledeneva 1998). He is essentially offering himself and his church as a *blat* patron to the Christian Center, and at the same time reminding its members that as fellow "Russians" (or former Soviets) both sides understand the obligations that go along with this relationship.

who bore prophetic messages about the Kingdom of God.[50] Drawing on the story of the

Prophet Elijah and the poor widow (1 Kings 17), one of Dzjuba's aides summed up the

message about the spiritual and material benefits such reverence for teachers would

bring:

> When you welcome the prophet in the name of the prophet, then your attitude towards the prophecy will determine your material future as well as your spiritual future. Then this word to which you have the right attitude will give you prosperity in material life and in spiritual life.[51]

To provide a deeper understanding of such spiritual matters, the Embassy of God in Kiev

circulates sermon tapes from guest preachers from an array of developing and "Asian

Tiger" countries, such as the Jamaican Miles Munroe, the Korean Yonggi Cho, and

Singaporean Kong Hee. Sunday Adelaja himself on one tape explicitly encourages his

listeners to listen to sermons from regions with burgeoning evangelical movements such

as South America, Korea, Africa – "God may reveal Himself there in such a way as you

have not yet seen" – while dismissing the books of well-known American Charismatics

such as Kenneth Hagin, dealing with how to receive healing or prosperity through faith,

as good for the first steps of the newly converted, but too simple for mature leaders.[52]

What the non-American speakers provide are not so much new structural models – these

are all contained in the U.S.-based literature on cell-driven churches. Rather they provide

an explanation for how the structural relationships translate into spiritual growth for

individuals and organizations. This means that metapragmatic explanations of how and

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[50] See Sunday Adelaja (Sandej Adeladzha), *Projavlenie Tsarstva Bozh'ego*. Tape from a leadership seminar, April 3, 1999. Kiev: Fares.
[51] Taped sermon, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 10, 2005.
[52] Sunday Adelaja [Sandej Adeladzha], *Lichnoe razvitie v liderakh.* Tape from a leadership seminar, April 2, 1999. Kiev: Fares. Adeladzha's disdain notwithstanding, I saw the Russian translation of Hagin's *How to be led by the Spirit of God* (Hagin 1997) on the bookshelves of several of the Christian Center's members.

why social forms work can circulate along different pathways than the forms themselves, causing further difficulties for historians interested in sorting out questions of historical transmission.

To make this case fruitful to a discussion of transformations of secular forms into postsecular religion, it seems necessary to point out that Kharkhordin's postulation of continuity between Orthodox monastic practices and Soviet collectives overlooks the fact that many Bolshevik methodologies of collective study were pioneered before 1917 among exiled Russian social democrats in Western Europe. They may have been more immediately influenced by traditions of the European left and reform pedagogy than by Russian Orthodoxy (David-Fox 1997: 26-37; Scherrer 1978). With its values of speed and newness, the Soviet system of study circles was more akin to the growth-oriented structures of evangelical Protestant organizations than to the Orthodox church, where knowledge is authoritative precisely when it is not new, and where the tradition of the church, embodied in such form as the yearly festival cycle and liturgical texts (cf. Florovsky 1963), restrains clergy from the idea that they have personal access to the "thoughts that God wishes that they would start working in the church."

The elective affinity between cell churches and revolutionary parties bundles a variety of relationships of functional equivalence and historical influence. Both kinds of institutions developed their institutional structures under conditions of clandestinity or political, economic, and moral precarity. If study circles and cell groups function similarly, one of the reasons why the latter work in Russia may well be that there are many people who are skilled in leading discussions in the same kind of group. Unlike Marshall Sahlins's "structure of the conjuncture" (1985) where actors interact with

elements of a foreign cultural system *as if* they were functional equivalents of something familiar from their own system, this looks like a case where misrecognizing functional equivalences allows people to continue acting in very similar ways.

At the same time, post-war Soviet study circles never theologized the teacher into a "prophet," something that would have been easily criticized as Stalin-type "cult of personality" after the twentieth party congress. If there is a point in identifying an elective affinity between study circles and cell groups, it is neither in claiming total functional equivalence nor demonstrable historical succession. As I pointed out in the introduction, an elective affinity is not a causal-temporal chain in which one element is the original and the other its copy or descendant. Rather, it is a relationship of ongoing mutual transformation between elements of disparate origin, in the course of which both reveal qualities that were absent or invisible in the original state. Applied to the example of church and party cells, the concept of elective affinities would then mean that religion does not turn into secular education or vice versa, but both realms reveal some of their potential only in the course of their ongoing histories of encounter. For example, whether cast as relatively powerless, popularizing transmitters or theologized as "prophets," methodicians of all stripes have certain commonalities. Their work is dominated by a focus on slow, incremental change and a preoccupation with questions of how to do something rather than whether or not to do it. In Stefan Plaggenborg's words, methodicians are people who are concerned with the "transformation and transformability of mental and physical constitutions," rather than with assuming the "interchangeability" of obsolete people and circumstances (Plaggenborg 1996: 40). The compromises with pre-existing reality implied in this stance may help explain Adorno's perception of the

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subservient powerlessness of pedagogues, as well as widespread suspicions about their manipulative power.

The chapters in the following section observe Soviet and post-Soviet methodicians in the slow work of engaging with materials in order to transform them. A student of their work has to become as expert as they in identifying pathways of circulation for forms and skills, and in paying attention to the role of various human senses in transformative disciplines. Each chapter considers a different area of methodological concern, and the different relationships between secular and religious forms within it. Chapter 3 focuses on didacticism as a particular way of structuring ideological transmission through the circulation of didactic materials, chapter 4 on the attractions of such structures for post-Soviet religious groups that lack them. Chapter 5 discusses pedagogical traditions that link ideas about images in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia. In following methodologies across secular and postsecular permutations, we will learn to be more specific about the bundles of relationships subsumed under the term "elective affinity." Among enthusiasts and critics of didactic method, we will also encounter a nuanced vocabulary for articulating the stakes and risks of transformative endeavors.

PART II

METHODOLOGIES

Chapter 3

Church closings and sermon circuits: The power of didacticism

Between August 15 and 18, 1960, 110 enterprises and medical, educational, and cultural institutions across the city of Joshkar-Ola held assemblies of their workforce. On the agenda everywhere was a lecture on the topic "The communist education of the toilers and the overcoming of religious prejudices at the present stage," followed by a discussion and resolution on the closing of the last functioning Orthodox church of the city, the Church of the Resurrection. The result was not surprising, given the mounting pressure to close houses of worship all over the Soviet Union in 1960 and 1961 (Chumachenko 2002; Shkvarovskij 1995): all assemblies, representing 17,000 workers and white-collar employees, passed resolutions demanding the church be closed, many of them unanimously.[1] At the request of the Council of Ministers of the Mari ASSR, the USSR Council for Russian-Orthodox Church Affairs confirmed the closing of the church on

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[1] The figures of 110 enterprises and 17,000 employees come from the report of Commissioner Smirnov to the Council for Orthodox Church Affairs, September 1960 (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 240-243). The collected minutes of the meetings make up a file of 265 pages (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a).

November 19, forcing the congregation to merge with that of the village of Semёnovka, approximately five miles outside of town.[2]

Although the result was predictable, the process by which it was achieved is perhaps more remarkable than it seems at first. Perfunctory as these assemblies may have been, it must have been no small organizational challenge to bring together thousands of workers at over a hundred locations in the city within a space of four days to listen to lectures on an identical topic, delivered not by radio, film or recording, but by dozens of human individuals, and to secure voices from among the employees formulating support of the resolution in a dogmatically orthodox, but not uniform way. For this strategy of mass mobilization to succeed, local lecturers had to be able to understand the message behind the prescribed lecture theme and generate variations of it. The risks of human error and misunderstanding involved in the reproduction of doctrinary truths would have been familiar to methodicians of various ideological stripes, and looking through their eyes can help us understand the role of teaching in making theory take hold of the masses, to paraphrase the Marx quote with which I began the previous chapter.

This chapter takes the workers' assemblies of 1960 as a starting point for asking how and why didacticism can become a crucial ingredient for mobilizing and energizing centralized, but flexible organizations. Didacticism, I argue, is powerful by virtue of its promise of future change, and its way of integrating individual hopes and aspirations into larger social frameworks. Insisting on the power of didacticism means questioning assumptions about cynicism and "pro forma" performance that are common in studies of late Soviet ideological workers. At the same time, affinities between the use of

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[2] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 237 (Excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the Council for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs, November 19, 1960).

didacticism in evangelical Protestantism and Soviet mass mobilizations helps us ask what it is about both kinds of organizations that makes them use similar strategies.

In this chapter, I mainly juxtapose secular and postsecular didacticisms for purposes of mutual illumination, setting aside the question of their historical connection in the Mari republic. This connection comes into focus in the following chapter, where I discuss recent attempts among chimarij Pagans to set up teaching networks in the service of their religious revival. Before moving into that history, it seems important to understand the particular promises of didacticism, which help explain why people who have encountered it in secular contexts would want to apply it in religious life as well.

Didacticism - the power of the future

A number of scholars have identified the didactic dimensions of such early forms of Soviet public discourse as show trials, collective evaluations, or demonstrative unveilings (David-Fox 1997; Kharkhordin 1999; Northrop 2004: 154-160; Wood 2005). In order to understand the power of didacticism to draw participants into ideological projects, we have to see it as a framework of interaction in which an institution is offering both teachers and students a way to becoming something they currently are not – more proficient, more informed, more responsible. In claiming that didacticism lent a particular forward-moving momentum to late Soviet projects of mobilization, I am contradicting common views of Soviet society and of modern educational systems, both of which are more commonly associated with stasis than with a movement toward the future.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I discuss a view of late Soviet propaganda as the cynical and effortless reproduction of a received official discourse whose

referential meaning was largely indifferent to propagandists and audiences alike. This view of the cynical subjects of late socialism has found its most creative recent formulation by Alexei Yurchak (1997, 2006), who claims that participation in official events involved performance of the correct subject position of the "normal person," rather than any engagement with the propositional content of official discourse. Though a necessary corrective to the preoccupation of older scholarship with questions of assent or resistance, Yurchak's approach still treats official discourse as generally known and accessible, and assumes that people engaged in cultural and political work had a certain bored mastery over it. While Yurchak's work largely relies on retrospective interviews with highly educated urbanites, documents from provincial archives paint a different picture: one of ill-prepared provincial methodicians only half mastering the discourse they were engaged in transmitting to the masses, and of overburdened training networks that were beset with misunderstanding, but for that very reason also required local creativity. Before getting deeper into these archival files, I would like to explain how reading them as documents of didactic interactions would change our approach to Soviet official discourse.

For one thing, a focus on didactic dimensions emphasizes openness toward the future as a core feature of Soviet mass mobilizations such as those of the Khrushchev era. This may be counterintuitive, because studies of education often share with studies of late Soviet culture an emphasis on predictability, stagnation, and circularity. Following in the spirit of a provocative study by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1970), research in the ethnography of education has tended to focus on the way in which education reproduces social inequalities from outside the classroom (Collins 2003;

McDermott and Tylbor 1995; Philips 1982; Willis 1981; Wortham 1994). Not wanting to deny the importance of this critique, I would like to propose that those aspects of education that are transformative and open towards the future, though methodologically difficult to apprehend in empirical analysis (Miyazaki 2004), may be a key to understanding its power.

Sheila Fitzpatrick's (1979) work on the link between education, purges, and social mobility in the Stalin era reminds us that the capacity of mass schooling to propel people into new social positions can have even more deadly consequences than the conservative tendencies that worry analysts in other contexts. As discussed in the previous chapter, even in the more stable social setting of the post-war Soviet Union, teaching was still thought of as a transformative experience for those doing the teaching as well as for those taught. The persistent requests for methodical guidance in training seminars show that being assigned the role of teacher did indeed challenge people to strive for skills that they did not yet have, and to seek out closer contact with the state and party institutions whose task it was to provide such skills. Rather than seeing official Soviet culture as a realm of the performance of familiar subject positions, I would thus like to emphasize the element of learning that successful participation required.

During the mass mobilizations of the Khrushchev era, there was a particular need for a growing number of transmitters, who had to be prepared for their tasks through training provided by the party or mass organizations. Social interactions in training networks have a necessary openness toward the future, because part of their "felicity conditions" (Austin 1965: 14-15; Goffman 1983) is the assumption that, though at present the instructor is relatively more proficient and the students owe him or her an

amount of deference, this imbalance is on the way to change through the process of learning.[3] At the same time, taking on a teaching role may be the most potent occasion for engaging with the propositional content of the official discourse, because for teachers who are still in training themselves, "getting things right" can become an intense focus of correct performance. Rather than focusing on the ostensibly stable characteristics of Yurchak's "late socialist subjects," an analysis of the role of teaching and learning in Soviet public culture would require paying attention to different forms of what Erving Goffman ([1974] 1986: 247) calls "anchoring" of interactional frames: whether and how the transformative promises of didactic interactions carried over into other areas of social life, and to what extent people expected that they should.

One way in which the transformative roles of didacticism were anchored to wider social reality was in a larger discourse about the value of newness. Even in the era of stagnation, methodicians constantly had to report on using "new methods" and "new forms" of propaganda. Secular holidays were still labeled "new revolutionary traditions" in the 1970s, although they had been in use since the 1920s (Vysshaja profsojuznaja shkola kul'tury 1977: 61). Didactic approaches to atheist propaganda were heralded as an innovation over pre-war *popoedstvo* (anticlerical "parson-eating"), although they had precedents in the policies of the early 1920s (Andrews 2003: 110).

This rhetorical homage to newness coexisted with what Yurchak terms a "citational temporality," where "all types of information, new and old, were presented as

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[3] Thus, Elizabeth Mertz (2007) argues in her study of first-year law school classrooms in the United States that the infamous "Socratic method" is often practiced in such a way as to invite students to take up the speaking position of lawyers able to mobilize conventions of legal authority to their advantage. Alexandra Jaffe (2003) notes that while the teacher in a bilingual primary school on Corsica used Corsican lessons to insist on standards of grammar and pronunciation without which she feared students would not be recognized as proficient speakers, she also treated students as people who were already speakers of Corsican and who collectively "owned" the language. In both cases, pedagogical practices were geared toward enabling students to inhabit the double roles of learner and incipient expert.

knowledge previously asserted and commonly known" (Yurchak 2006: 61). To diminish the apparent contradiction, we might think of citational temporality as part of the circulation of teaching materials, which depended on and honed the generative competence of local practitioners. Through citational practices, local didactic interactions were anchored to larger instructional networks, networks that served to steer and restrain local innovation and to mediate access to new ideas from elsewhere.

I would like to suggest that the social power of didacticism lies in this capacity to mediate between preservation and change, with different outcomes depending on the historical situation. It also offers relationships between centers and peripheries that are rigid enough to ensure doctrinary orthodoxy, and flexible enough to engage the interest of peripheral practitioners. As we will see, Soviet methodicians were often provided with little else than lecture topics, and had to generate both the content of the lecture and the appealing framing of posters or ancillary events that would draw an audience.

As an alternative to the picture of widespread apathy that often dominates descriptions of late Soviet culture, I will focus on the channels through which Soviet cultural propaganda could capture the attention of provincial publics. Didacticism's promises of future transformation help us understand the cultural power of the popular mobilizations of the Khrushchev era, of which the church closing in Joshkar-Ola is an example. After discussing the dynamics of the church closing, later parts of this chapter will move to a comparison with global religious organizations that grow as networks of teachers and disciples, maintaining internal discipline with very little formulated doctrine. The power of didacticism can be harnessed in the service of different ideological aims, and its flexibility is sometimes mistaken for an absence of centralized authority.

Lessons of a church closing

Any claims about a general late-Soviet cynicism need to come to terms with the enthusiasm and disappointments of the Thaw years that followed Stalin's death. Under First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, the communist party relied on a number of populist initiatives to generate enthusiasm about the approach of communism, which was declared to be immanent at the 1961 party congress. In the years leading up to this congress, young people participated in the Virgin Land Campaigns to claim steppe lands for agriculture (McCawley 1976) and comrades' courts and people's patrols involved citizens in promoting communist morality at workplaces and residences (Field 2007). Such initiatives used didactic frames for popular mobilization in ways that would no longer be possible under the more bureaucratic style of leadership of Khrushchev's successor, Leonid Brezhnev (Breslauer 1982; Medvedev 1987: 197-205).

The anti-religious campaigns of the Khrushchev era share many features of these mobilizing campaigns (Stone 2008), and show how didactic elements helped keep populism within administrative bounds. When a 1954 central committee resolution unleashed outbreaks by members of the Komsomol against religious congregations, they were quickly criticized in a second resolution. A second campaign, which began in 1958 and lasted until 1961, emphasized "communist legality" in the administration of religious organizations. Local administrations were urged to apply Soviet laws on religious affairs as stringently as they had not been since the war, leading to the closing of many houses of worship for alleged violations (Chumachenko 2002: 131, 161). The workers' assemblies that led to the closing of Joshkar-Ola's last functioning church fall into the latter campaign, but also need to be placed into another context: that of the increasing

importance of "[moral] education" (*vospitanie*) in discourses about propaganda (Field 2007). As we will see below, lectures of the same title as those delivered at the workers' assemblies were popularized in the Mari ASSR in response to the Central Committee resolution "On the tasks of party propaganda under present conditions" (January 9, 1960). The phrase "the communist education of the toilers (*kommunisticheskoe vospitanie trudjashchikhsja*)" in the title may have been directly inspired by this resolution, which declares that "the education of the masses" is "the basic method for the regulation of the vital activity of Soviet society" at this time of transition from socialism to communism.[4] With this ambitious program of governing through didactic measures, the Central Committee demanded that local party organizations at once encourage popular participation and direct it into politically desirable channels.

The minutes of the assemblies record responses to the lectures on communist education and religious prejudice, thus giving clues to the circulating forms through which didactic messages reached workers. The discussions often refer to city architecture and newspaper articles when drawing contrasts between the church as a thing of the past and Soviet society as moving into a shining future. The built environment and mass-mediatized information were among the available "teaching aids" that helped lecturers make their message intelligible and persuasive.

The changing topography of the city had increasingly placed the Resurrection Cathedral in an alienated and marginal position. The church had been closed before, between 1928 and 1944, when the eighteenth-century brick building housed first the cinema "October" and then one of the factories evacuated from Moscow to the Volga

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[4] *Pravda*, January 10, 1960.

region at the outbreak of war in 1941.[5] The building was the only church in the city to be reopened after the war – along the same street in the center of town where Resurrection Cathedral stood, there had once been two other large churches, but the Church of the Holy Trinity had been destroyed in 1939, and the Cathedral of the Ascension of Our Lord had been turned into a beer brewery (Starikov and Levenshtejn 2001: 17, 24).

Demoted from a cathedral into a church and having lost its formerly imposing bell tower in 1928, the reopened Resurrection Church had an uneasy existence in the center of a sovietizing Joshkar-Ola (fig. 3.1). The pre-revolutionary market square which it once dominated was now a park with a statue of Lenin at its center, and the street on which it stood, former Ascension Street in honor of the other cathedral, had been renamed Karl Marx Street in 1919.[6] When official documents referred to the church as located in "the building of the former cinema 'October',"[7] this further underlined its status as a tolerated, but alien institution, without roots in the city.

The campaign to close the church in 1960 coincided with a time of rapidly changing cityscapes. In Joshkar-Ola, construction of a new representative central square named after Vladimir Il'ich Lenin was almost completed near the western end of Karl Marx Street, farthest from the church and the former market square. The new Lenin

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[5] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 5 (Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Mari ASSR, April 6, 1944). See also Starikov and Levenshtejn 2001: 19.
[6] GARME, f. R-275, op. 1, d. 140, l. 7 (Resolution of the Tsarevokokshajsk regional executive committee, January 16, 1919, published in Tarasova et al. 2004: 191).
[7] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 246, report on the situation of churches in Joshkar-Ola, Commissioner for Russian Orthodox Church Affairs Smirnov, October 1, 1960. A similar struggle over historical perspective between Orthodox believers and Soviet officials is apparent in correspondence from 1973, when citizens of Joshkar-Ola petitioned for permission to use "the former building of the Church of the Ascension, which is occupied by the beer brewery" for divine services. In the negative response from the city government, the same building is pointedly referred to not as a former church, but as "the industrial building of the factory for beer and non-alcoholic drinks" (GARME, f. R-836, op. 2, d. 18, l. 13-14, families from the city of Joshkar-Ola to the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, January 2, 1973; GARME, f. R-836, op. 2, d. 18, l. 27, Joshkar-Ola City Executive Committee to E. A. Chemodanova, July 17, 1973).

Figure 3.1: Resurrection Church during the interlude between its reopening in 1944 and its destruction in 1960. Viewed from the west. The razed bell tower is visible to the right of the entrance. The tips of the fence visible in the foreground belong to the Lenin Park across the street from the church (Photo from Starikov and Levenshtejn 2001: 18).

Square was framed by a neoclassical theater, a hotel, and the new building of the Forestry-Technical Institute. Soon to follow were multi-storied government buildings in modernist style along nearby Lenin Avenue (Sanukov et al. 2004: 85-86).

1960 was also the year when, following a Central Committee resolution, the Mari regional party committee ordered construction firms in Joshkar-Ola to adopt the new technique of producing pre-fabricated concrete panels for the speedy construction of multi-storied apartment blocks, one of Khrushchev's projects that continues to shape the face of cities across the former Soviet Union to this day.[8]

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[8] GARME, f. P-1, op. 18, d. 149, l. 153-154 (Resolution of the Mari Regional Committee of the CPSU, April 13, 1960, published in Tarasova et al. 2004: 292-293). The promotion of faster methods of housing construction was part of Khrushchev's push to redirect some of the emphasis in economic development from heavy industry and the military toward satisfying the needs of consumers. In addition to the production of foodstuffs, electronic appliances, and plastics, this included providing modern housing units to replace the wooden houses and communal apartments in which many families still lived in the early 1960s (Nove 1982: 355; Ruble 1993).

The efforts of constructing modernized cities that came to a new peak in the late 1950s and early 1960s had many reasons – from offsetting wartime destruction and accommodating growing urban populations to making the cities conform to a modernist aesthetic of functionality, rationality, and control (Buchli 1999; Collier 2001; Ruble 1990; see also Kotkin 1995). Statements recorded at the assemblies show that one – probably not unintended – effect was to make pre-revolutionary architecture such as the church appear anachronistic and out of place. Speakers frequently draw a contrast between the church and its surroundings and express indignation or embarrassment about the church in the middle of the city. A member of the Committee for Radio Broadcasting and Television is quoted as saying that the church "spoils the very view of the city," and that he avoided walking along Karl Marx Street with his children, because he would prefer that they did not even know the word "church."[9] In the minutes of the assembly at the repair factory, a similar concern about children comes up:

> In the center of town there is a church and when you pass it by with children there's an uncomfortable feeling (*stanovitsja ne po sebe*), and children are curious and ask 'What is that there?' Against your will you have to lie to them and give them false explanations.[10]

The proximity of the church to the small park, a place of modern, cultured rest in Soviet rhetoric about cities, is often remarked upon as particularly inappropriate. One employee of the Mari publishing house is quoted as taking offense to the fact that the church forms

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[9] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 204-205 (Minutes of the assembly of the Committee on Radio Broadcasting and Television in the Council of Ministers of the Mari ASSR, August 18, 1960).
[10] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 54-56 (Minutes of the workforce assembly at the Joshkar-Ola Repair Shop, August 15, 1960).

the backdrop to the Lenin monument when viewed from the park's main entrance.[11] This

potential leakage between church space and public space was also treated as particularly

worrisome by the authorities: the accusation that members of the congregation were

collecting money from people in the park was one of the arguments for closing the

church in the official conclusion by the commissioner for church affairs prepared for his

superiors in Moscow.[12] As a place to spend free time, the church should be replaced by

the other offerings of a modern city: "People used to think it was a holiday to go to

church. But now we have many places where you can relax and have fun," as the minutes

of the factory for civil machine construction quote a storage worker.[13]

Such statements show that the attempt to frame the church as a scandal and

anachronism in a modern city was intelligible to a wide enough number of citizens to be

reflected in documents from all over the city. Even the members of the congregation who

wrote a letter of protest to Nikita Khrushchev acknowledged this sense of incompatibility

by insisting that the church was not in the center of the city ("no longer" might have been

the more accurate expression), implying that this made it less necessary to remove it.[14]

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[11] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 206-208 (Minutes of the workforce assembly at the Mari Publishing House, August 16, 1960). Another remark about the park is made in the minutes of the Mari Consumers Union, August 16, 1960 (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 95-98). The intended contrast between parks and religious sites is accentuated by the fact that, in Joshkar-Ola and elsewhere, some parks were literally established on the grounds of former cemeteries, drawing an opposition between open, modern public spaces and sacred sites, which could only be visited with ritual precautions (see chapter 1 on the use of sacred groves as sites of Soviet mass festivals, and also Dragadze 1993). While this particular park had not replaced a cemetery, but a market square (another institution of the old socio-economic system, relocated farther to the edge of the modern city center), the voices represented in the minutes quite accurately reproduce the discourse on the park as a quintessentially Soviet and secular place, with the exception of one over-eager critic who proclaims it to be also a shame that there is a prison on the other side of the park (see note 32 below).

[12] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 240-243.

[13] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 189-194 (Minutes of the workforce assembly at the production and storage units of the Mari Factory for Civil Machine Construction, August 16, 1960).

[14] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 283-285 (Believers from Joshkar-Ola to N.S. Khrushchev, December 30, 1960).

In addition to showing people's interpretation of long-term developments in urban topography, the documents related to the church closing also bear traces of more immediate preparations for the closing of this particular church. A series of newspaper articles across the first months of 1960 had initiated the gathering storm against the church. The minutes of workers assemblies show that lecturers read from or referred to these articles in their speeches, and participants in the discussion drew on them for formulating their arguments. A separate assembly of pensioners was held in the Park of Culture and Rest on August 12, specifically framed not as a lecture, but as a discussion of the article that most immediately preceded the meetings: "A brawl in the 'divine' temple," published that day in *Marijskaja Pravda*, the republic's main Russian-language daily.[15]

The article described a fight between parishioners that had erupted after the evening service on August 1, on the eve of St. Elijah's Day, a popular Orthodox holiday in Russia on which church attendance was likely higher than average. The fight, which allegedly started in the church and spilled out into the street, was between supporters of the rector of the parish and those of a younger priest whose impending removal to another parish had been announced at the end of the service. The author traced the falling-out between the two priests to competition over church funds, and accused the supporters of each priest of merely wanting to lay their hands on a larger share of the church income. Tellingly for the effects of the caricature of greed-driven churchmen in this article and others like it, speakers at the assemblies often focus on "fights" among the two priests over how to divide the church funds, although the article only describes

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[15] V. Alekseev, Potasovka v khrame "bozh'em." *Marijskaja Pravda,* August 12, 1960, p. 3. The assembly of pensioners is mentioned in the minutes of the workers' assembly at the Vitamin factory, August 16, 1960 (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 20-21).

parishioners physically fighting.[16] More frequently the minutes refer to the article as

evidence that the church is creating a "disturbance of the public order" or encouraging

"hooliganism."[17] These phrases come directly from the article itself, which also leaves no

doubt about the conclusion which readers are supposed to draw: "Therefore the workers

in enterprises, having learned of the systematic debauchery in the church, of the

disturbance of public order by the churchmen, are saying with indignation: - Isn't it time

to close down this breeding ground of hooliganism?"[18]

Two earlier articles that same year had a less explicit message, but are also taken

up during the discussions. On January 16, *Marijskaja Pravda* had already reported on the

disagreements between the two priests in the article "Preachings and deeds of the

spiritual fathers."[19] On May 11, both *Marijskaja Pravda* and its Mari-language

equivalent, *Marij kommuna*, reprinted versions of an article from a newspaper in the

Tatar ASSR, denouncing the greed, debauchery, and warmongering of Iov, who was

subsequently deposed as Archbishop of Kazan' (the diocese of which the Mari ASSR

was a part) under accusations of tax evasion and a past as a Nazi collaborator.[20] Although

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[16] In the words of one lecturer, "things have gone so far that fights are occurring in the church, not only between parishioners, but also between ministers of the church, as described in the newspaper *Marijskaja Pravda*" (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 23, minutes of the assembly of dairy and cooling facility workers, August 16, 1960). Similar conclusions are drawn in GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 36-37 (Minutes of the assembly of workshops 27 and 42, August 16, 1960).

[17] Disturbance of the public order (*narushenie obshchestvennogo porjadka*) is referred to in GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 15-16 (Minutes of the general trade union assembly of pharmacy employees, August 15, 1960) and GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 64-65 (Minutes of the assembly of the collective of the Republican Library of the Mari ASSR, August 15, 1960). Hooliganism is mentioned in GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 3-4 (Minutes of the assembly of the collective of the passenger transport facility, August 16, 1960), and "hooligan 'battles'" (*khuliganski[e] 'batali[i]'*) in GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 36-37 (Minutes of the assembly of the workers and employees of the automatic telephone exchange, August 16, 1960).

[18] V. Alekseev, Potasovka v khrame "bozh'em." *Marijskaja Pravda,* August 12, 1960, p. 3.

[19] "Propovedi i dela ottsov dukhovnykh," cited in GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 66 (Resolution of the collective of the Republican Library of the Mari ASSR, August 15, 1960).

[20] Ju. Kuprijanov and Ju. Nikolaev, Kazanskie ottsy dukhovnye i ikh dela grekhovnye. *Marijskaja Pravda*, May 11, 1960, p. 4; idem, Jumyn engzhe-vlak da nunyn sulykan pashasht. *Marij kommuna*, May 11, 1960, p. 4. The Mari-language article is longer, probably an unabridged version of the original article from

the case had no direct connection to Resurrection Church, this article is frequently

mentioned in lectures and discussion, with references to Iov's alleged ties to the Germans

in occupied Ukraine, his illicit self-enrichment in Kazan', and the threat he poses to peace

both within the Soviet Union and internationally.[21] In addition to the charge of

welcoming the Germans to Ukraine, the article accuses him of making priests in Kazan'

diocese use "long forgotten akathistoi [hymns in praise of a saint or an icon] calling for

national enmity between Russians and Tatars."[22]

Although the articles about the archbishop and those about the fights in the church

made no explicit references to each other, all are taken up in recorded statements at the

assemblies, and are contrasted with positive themes that were prominent in press

coverage of the Khrushchev era. The same August 12 issue of *Marijskaja Pravda* that

carried the article about the fight in the church started with a report about Khrushchev's

speech at the UN General Assembly on its front page, reprinted from Moscow's central

Sovetskaja Tatarija. The story of Archbishop Iov's trial and deposition is told in Sud zal gych: Arkhiepiskop Iovym razoblachatlyme. *Marij kommuna*, June 24, 1960, p. 4, also translated from *Sovetskaja Tatarija*. It is possible that the longer and more complete coverage of the matter in the Mari-language paper reflects the editors' perception that Mari speakers were more likely to hold religious sympathies than Russian speakers, but it may also be that religious issues were not seen as important enough to take up so much space in the Russian-language paper, which had the larger print run and wider distribution.

[21] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 52 (Minutes of the assembly of workers at the brick factory "12 years of October," August 15, 1960); GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 54-56.

[22] Ju. Kuprijanov, Ju. Nikolaev, Kazanskie ottsy dukhovnye i ikh dela grekhovnye. *Marijskaja Pravda*, May 11, 1960, p. 4. While the charges against Archbishop Iov are so stereotypical that it may be misleading to search for their factual foundation, it is not entirely unlikely that a church dignitary in occupied Ukraine at least initially welcomed the German forces, who cast themselves as liberators from "godless" Bolshevism (Berkhoff 2004; Peris 2000). And the objectionable akathistos could have been the one devoted to the Kazan' icon of the Mother of God, an icon revered throughout Russia, but of special local significance in the Volga region. The icon's discovery in the sixteenth century fell into a time when the conquest of Kazan' by Muscovite forces was still challenged by Tatar resistance, and the akathistos (written in the nineteenth century by a professor of the Kazan' Theological Academy) refers to the moment of the appearance of the icon as a time when "the Christian faith is insulted by the agarian misbelief" (*agarjanskim zloveriem*; *agarjane* being an old term for the Mongols) and addresses Mary as "exposure of the agarian misbelief," "confirmation of the Christian faith," and "deliverance from the invasion of foreign tribes" (Sretenskij monastyr' 2004, Kontakion 2, Ikos 2, Ikos 10). The icon also played a role in the defense of Moscow from European foes (Polish armies in the seventeenth century, Napoleon in the nineteenth), and Patriarch Sergij reportedly prayed before it for help against Hitler's armies during World War II (Shevzov 2007; Sretenskij monastyr' 2004: 30-32). So its veneration in Kazan' in the 1950s may have been intended as an expression of Soviet patriotism rather than a call to interethnic strife.

party organ, *Pravda*. A woman quoted in the assembly minutes connects positive and

negative themes to demand drastic measures against Iov and others, who she had

concluded were making money from preaching "the inevitability of war:"

> What horrors and suffering war brings! I would now travel around the whole
> world together with Khrushchev in order to preserve peace for eternity. In my
> opinion, the church in Joshkar-Ola must be liquidated, all the property
> confiscated, the buildings handed over as service buildings, and the clergy
> themselves should be sent to build roads in the North.[23]

The use of newspaper articles in lectures and discussions indicates the didactic function

of information in Khrushchev's populism. The files of the commissioner for religious

affairs indicate that although state organs may not have been wholly responsible for the

discord between the two priests and the factionalism in the congregation, they had

monitored it through reports and complaints from parishioners over several months.[24]

Since *Marijskaja pravda* was the organ of the Mari regional party committee (*Obkom*)

and had to coordinate its content with the party bureau, the timing at which articles about

the church were published were probably no coincidence. There is also evidence that the

list of speakers at the meetings were culled by the organizers, to reflect a vision of what

public opinion should be rather than the diversity of views that actually existed. In a letter

sent simultaneously to Khrushchev and to the church administration in Moscow, elderly

believers from Joshkar-Ola claim that the pensioners' assembly which sanctioned the

closing of the church on August 19 was attended not only by pensioners, but by "many

young people" as well, and that only those three or four people included on the speakers

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[23] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 54-56.
[24] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 201-202 ([A named member of the congregation of Resurrection Church] to the Commissioner in the House of Soviets, April 4, 1960); GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 229-234 (Believers of the city of Joshkar-Ola to the Commissioner for Church affairs of the Mari ASSR, June 27, 1960).

list were in favor of the closing, "and the others were all unanimously against the destruction of the temple, but they weren't even allowed to say a single word."[25]

It seems easy to trace the didactic intentions of the city party leadership that coordinated the assemblies and the networks of trade unions and Knowledge Society lecturers which carried them out. But postulating didactic effects hinges to some degree on the question whose voices are recorded in these minutes. In addition to culling of lists of speakers, there is also the possibility that invented quotes are added into the minutes or that some of these documents were written without ever holding an actual meeting, as Yurchak's (2006: 100-102) informants remember it as frequent practice in Komsomol, trade union and party cell meetings in the 1970s and 1980s. Especially those cases where the minutes record no names of speakers or summaries of what they said, but simply state the number of speakers and the text of the resolution passed, cast into doubt whether anyone actually met to vote on the resolution.[26]

While I would agree that the thick file of minutes tells us little about the degree of atheist conviction among the working population of the city, I would nonetheless argue that it documents important channels along which relatively large parts of the population engaged with propaganda messages. As Daniel Peris (1998) points out for pre-war atheist work, part of the target of the mobilization may not even have been the "public opinion" of the workforce, but the collected documentation of meetings may have been addressed

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[25] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 3, l. 279 (Orthodox Christians of the Resurrection Cathedral Joshkar-Ola to N.S. Khrushchev, December 22, 1960). It is unclear if this is the same pensioners' assembly referred to in the minutes of the Vitamin factory as having taken place on August 12 (see note 15 above). The authors of this letter may have misremembered the date, or there may have been a second assembly.

[26] For instance, GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 27 (Minutes of the meeting of workers of the State Bank and Construction Bank, August 16, 1960). Tayloring reports to confirm the expectations of superior agencies may be a feature of all bureaucracies, but scholars working on socialist planned economies have also argued that planning itself placed certain constraints on actors that made double bookkeeping and doctored numbers endemic (see Humphrey 1998: 211-227; Verdery 2003: 60-61, 74-75).

to those higher up in the hierarchy, who needed to be convinced that atheists in Joshkar-Ola were doing appropriate work. But I would still maintain that the resulting paper trail suggests something about the necessary dependence of ideological mobilization on people's capacity to learn. No matter whether they record the voices of actual workers or the imagination of trade union activists entrusted with writing minutes, the documents connected to the church closing help us see the efforts through which large numbers of people developed some measure of proficiency in ideological discourse.

Didacticism as effortful reproduction

Regardless whether these minutes record the actual statements of participants or fabrications of minute-takers, they present evidence of the kind of learning that had to occur in order for propaganda messages to spread. First of all, even if some of the assemblies did not take place, writing the minutes would still require at least one person in each enterprise capable of making ideologically correct statements about the incompatibility of the church with current developments in the Soviet Union. The wide range of graphic styles (typed or handwritten, in various hands and colors of ink, with varying degrees of orthographic correctness) indicates that the minutes come from diverse sources and are unlikely to have all been composed in the office of the commissioner of religious affairs. The resolutions, too, are predictable in their content, but differ in their wording and in concrete recommendations for what to do with the church building.[27] And although the content of the initial lecture is not always recorded

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[27] For instance, one resolution calls for the building to be turned into a club (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 30 – Minutes of the assembly at the Asphalt-Concrete Works and Garage of the City Repair Trust, August 16, 1960), another also calls for stronger measures against Baptists (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d.

(often the minutes state merely the lecture title, uniform across the board, and the name

of the lecturer), where the minutes do include a summary, these are quite different in each

case (fig. 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Two sample lecture summaries on the topic "The communist education of the toilers and the overcoming of religious prejudice at the present stage."

Automatic Telephone Exchange, August 16, 1960
Heard: A presentation of the head of the telephone exchange [name], who noted in his presentation that besides suffering and deceit religious prejudices do not bring any good to the working masses. Religious ideology makes people into slaves to all kinds of imaginations of divinity, causes laziness, stinginess, and deceit. In some cases it takes away the last hard-earned penny from the toilers, and even conducts anti-Soviet preaching, provoking Soviet people – those people who overthrew the power of capitalism, built socialism, opened the era of Soviet satellites, the era of rockets, and are moving successfully toward the bright future of communism. For their part, the religious obscurantists are slowing down the building of communist society to some degree, and for this reason the only correct decision for us can be to uproot this religious evil in the city of Joshkar-Ola, to ask the superior organs to end the existence of the church of Joshkar-Ola, that is to say the Resurrection Cathedral. Not to allow in the future the breeding-ground of deceit, stinginess, and hooligan "fights" to the benefit of the clergy.
(GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 5)

Workshop No. 6 at the Organization "P.O. Box 42", August 16, 1960
Presentation of the candidate of historical sciences comrade [last name]:
In our country religious prejudices and survivals have mainly been liquidated, but they still occur among elderly people and especially among old Maris. The youth of our country is being brought up in a communist spirit and knows neither church nor gods. Among the backward milieus there are still believers in christ and other gods, there are various sects, which pull weak-willed people into their milieu even from among young people and the adult population. Religious confession is not prohibited by law in our country, from the earliest days of Soviet power the church is separated from the state and the fulfillment of religious rites is not prohibited, but nevertheless we know that religion leads to no good, it spiritually poisons our Soviet people.
(GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 116-117)

The variation in lecture content means that organizing the assemblies required locating

and training an adequate number of people capable of preparing and delivering a lecture

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11a, l. 57 – Minutes of the assembly at the Joshkar-Ola Repair Factory, August 15, 1960). Both points correspond to suggestions made in the recorded discussion.

on the topic "The communist education of the toilers and the overcoming of religious prejudices at the present stage." The plans for 1960 of the communist party's Joshkar-Ola city committee for work in fulfillment of the Central Committee resolution "On the tasks of party propaganda under present conditions" contain a list of training seminars for atheist propagandists to be held at the House of Political Enlightenment, the first of which has the same title as the lecture.[28] This was one probable source of preparation for a number of lecturers.

Responsible for the seminars was G. N. Chistjakov, a staff member of the city committee's department of propaganda and agitation who also participated in the work of the Knowledge Society.[29] He himself delivered the lecture in a number of enterprises. At other places, lecturers from the party or the Knowledge Society performed this task, elsewhere it was the director or another leading member of the organization where the assembly was held, especially in the case of educational, cultural, or medical institutions, whose leadership was apparently assumed to have a higher level of political education. While materials were available to lecturers through the seminar and the newspaper articles, which many seem to have drawn on in their lectures, the differences in summaries suggest that constructing a lecture text out of these elements was the individual responsibility of the lecturer; they were apparently not reading a previously distributed text. Other evidence on the practices of Soviet lecturers corroborates this, and

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[28] GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, d. 484, l. 75 (Appendix 2, Minutes of the bureau of the city committee, March 3, 1960).
[29] Chistjakov's role in both organizations, and as a liaison between them, is documented in GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, d. 492, l. 7-11 (Minutes of the bureau of the city committee, August 25, 1960 – where he is named as a staff member of the department for propaganda and agitation responsible for atheist work) and GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 69, l. 9-11 (Minutes of the meeting of the section for scientific atheism of the Mari division of the Knowledge Society, November 3, 1960 – where he participates as a member and reports on the above meeting of the city committee bureau).

points to the art of putting together new products from pre-given elements as a crucial

aspect of the methodician's work, as I will elaborate further down.

Mistakes in the minutes are perhaps the clearest indication that they document the

efforts of people relatively unfamiliar with official discourse. In the following instance,

either the lecturer had misunderstood information from higher instances, or the person

who was taking the minutes did not fully understand what the lecturer said. In the hand-

written minutes of produce store No. 2, a part of the lecture is summarized as: "Professor

Bogoslov was writing the latest publishing house of the bible, but he renunced

religion."[30] Either the lecturer or the minute-taker apparently heard the word *bogoslov*

(theologian) as a family name, failing to understand *professor-bogoslov* as a professional

designation, "a professor of theology." Likewise, somewhere along the chain of

transmission *izdanie* (edition) turned into *izdatel'stvo* (publishing house), the more likely

fact that this theologian published an edition of the bible was misunderstood as meaning

that he wrote it, and the irregular past tense *otrëksja* (he renounced) was heard or spelled

as *otrësja*.

Such semantic and grammatical mistakes show that neither the presence of

capable lecturers nor of comprehending audiences could be taken for granted.[31] More

evidence that the reproduction of ideological discourse was everything but effortless

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[30] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 99 (Minutes of the assembly of workers in produce store No. 2, August 16, 1960). In Russian, the sentence reads "Professor Bogoslov pisal poslednee izdatel'stvo biblii, no on otresja ot religii." The remainder of the minutes from this store is also full of orthographic and grammatical errors, indicating that the problem may have lain more with the minute-taker than with the lecturer.

[31] The difficulty of reproducing official discourse may have been greater in a region like the Mari ASSR, where a good portion of those delivering and listening to lectures and writing minutes were not native speakers of Russian. As Caroline Humphrey (1989) notes for Buryat, by the late Soviet era official Russian discourse had become so familiar that it influenced many formulaic expressions and grammatical features of other languages spoken in the Soviet Union. But it is still possible that some of the lexical and spelling mistakes are a consequence of people keeping the records who were relatively less fluent in Russian, the obligatory language of official records.

comes from statements that seem unintentionally ideologically incorrect. In Stephen

Kotkin's terms (1995: 222, 503 n.115) one might say that people try to "speak

Bolshevik," but fail. For instance, the same staff member of the publishing house who

reportedly objected to the church forming a backdrop to the Lenin monument, also

demands that the prison, located on the other side of park, be removed from the city

center, equating the prison (a state institution) with the church (one that was considered

alien to the Soviet state).[32] Elsewhere, a woman with a Tatar surname remarks that it is

unjust that Russians have a church to pray in while Tatars have no mosque in Joshkar-

Ola.[33] While this statement can be useful as evidence that the presence of religious

institutions incites interethnic envy, it plainly does not speak of a developed atheist

consciousness. One questioner from the floor inquires if the city government could force

the church to lower its fees for religious rites, suggesting an interest in enlisting the

state's help in making religious practices more affordable rather than eliminating them.[34]

All of these statements are framed as support of the general criticism of the church, and

none of them elicits corrections from lecturers or other participants. Local organizers

evidently also struggled to correctly apply the message of radical incompatibility and

distance between religious and Soviet institutions.[35]

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[32] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 206-208.
[33] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 32 (Minutes of the assembly of workers in the children's hospital, August 15, 1960).
[34] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 10-11 (Minutes of the assembly of workers the sewing workshop "Truzhenitsa," August 16, 1960).
[35] Part of the problem with passing on this message of incompatibility lay in the inconsistencies of Soviet atheist discourse. Reminders in the minutes that the Orthodox Church might be undesirable, but that Baptists and other "sects" also needed increased attention, correctly echoed what newspapers and circulars at the time were saying (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 15-16; GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 54-56). But such statements were also in line with the divisions between legitimate church and illegitimate sect that the Orthodox Church itself promoted, creating a potential zone of confusion between Russian Orthodox and atheist motivations.

Minutes also record comments that oppose the church closing or caution against its possible consequences, and those are often followed by immediate rebukes from the lecturer or other participants. For instance, minutes from the bread factory record a remark to the effect that if the church is closed, believers will start petitioning for it to open up again. The lecturer rejects this as an inappropriate concern: "That is the believers' business. Let them petition. Or what are you trying to suggest?"[36] Elsewhere, a woman is quoted as saying that since the church is mainly visited by elderly people, pensioners, rather than the working-age population, should decide whether to close it or not. Her remark is followed by a colleague's reminder about social responsibility: "At the present time people's consciousness is rising, people are taking the creation of public order into their own hands, and we cannot just walk past such a disgrace either."[37]

In some minutes, such dissenting voices translate into small numbers of votes against the resolution to close the church.[38] As we have seen, such explicit opposition is just one of a number of ways to be in misalignment with the performative role of the conscientious and responsible builder of communism. Some ideologically incorrect positions are corrected by other participants, some are not. If, as Yurchak claims, voting for a resolution at an official meeting was a performative act by which participants reproduced themselves "as a 'normal' Soviet person […] with all the constraints and

[36] (GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 146-147, minutes of the assembly of workers of the bread factory, August 16, 1960.)
[37] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 39-40 (Minutes of the assembly of workers in workshop 26, August 16, 1960).
[38] GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 39-40 (7 votes against, 330 in favor); GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 144-145 (Minutes of the assembly of workers in the shoe factory, August 15, 1960 – 2 votes against, 156 in favor); GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 171-171ob (Minutes of the assembly of workers in the city hospital, n.d., 1 vote against, 1 abstention, 198 in favor) ; GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 177-178 (Minutes of the assembly of workers in workshop 8 of the PDO, OGK, OGT, n.d., 6 votes against, 176 in favor); GARME, f. R-836, op. 1, d. 11a, l. 220-221 (Minutes of the assembly of workers at Joshkar-Ola station, August 17, 1960, 2 votes against, 7 abstentions, 63 in favor).

possibilities that position entailed" (2006: 25), these instances of misalignment raise the question how people knew what roles were expected of them. At the least, meetings need to be seen as opportunities to *learn* how to be a "normal Soviet person," rather than merely as performances of such Soviet personhood. But if even the organizers of the events were not always sure about the boundaries of ideological correctness, the didactic challenge extends to them as well.

Mistakes and misalignments show that spreading authoritative discourse was, among other things, a learning challenge: widening circles of participants had to learn the requisite vocabulary as well as the performance styles required of them during popular mobilizations. Whether the minutes record actual discussions or a local staff member's idea of what such a discussion should look like, they show that the people who passed on ideological messages were themselves unsure of what would constitute correct wording and behavior. The reproduction of authoritative discourse was thus not automatic, but depended on simultaneous processes of teaching and learning, and this, I would argue, was key to its mobilizing power.

Teaching as dissemination and replication

A combined look at archival materials and at the memories of former propagandists illustrates my claim that the forms in which Soviet authoritative discourse circulated required the imaginative participation of transmitters in order to ensure its flexible, but centrally directed reproduction. A similar combination of local flexibility and disciplinary rigidity was characteristic of evangelical religious groups at the time of my fieldwork. In both contexts, didacticism formed a way of linking centers and peripheries and of

steering growth. Looking at the didacticism of Soviet cultural enlightenment work and evangelical Protestants together makes the workings of power in each type of organization easier to see.

More precisely, understanding Soviet methodicians as facing problems comparable to those of teachers in other kinds of institutional settings can help us see non-cynical implications of Soviet performativity. And calling attention to the central role of didacticism and teacher-student relationships in the theology and practice of evangelical groups can illuminate some of the peculiarity of these groups, which ethnographers tend to overlook when they accept evangelical self-descriptions of their churches as "nondenominational," emphasizing "Jesus rather than creeds or doctrines" (Erzen 2006: 61, 71) or of the "no-frills, ordinary-folks approach" of their worship (Luhrmann 2004: 519). In short, I think that the lens of didacticism can make Soviet methodicians seem more familiar and evangelical Christians stranger than they are often represented in existing scholarship.

As institutions reaching out to infinite strangers, Soviet agencies of cultural enlightenment and evangelical missions both strive to form a public in Michael Warner's sense of a social entity which "exists by virtue of being addressed" (Warner 2002: 62) and constitutes itself in relation to circulating discourse. By forming networks for the circulation and exchange of lectures, sermons, and methodical advice, they participate in what Greg Urban calls a "metaculture of newness," a system of judgments about culture propelled by the speedy travel of things, people, and ideas and characterized by value placed on new creation rather than reproduction of old forms (Urban 2001: 67).

In Urban's neo-diffusionist analysis, such a metaculture of newness is linked to a distinctive mode of transmission that goes along with modern mass media. Suitable for mechanical reproduction, mass media is freed from the constraints of cultural objects that must be personally reproduced, whose "dissemination" as externalized, perceptible things (in the telling of a myth, or in an object such as a clay pot or a basket) must be followed by "replication," when people have learned to internalize the skills that go into a performance or a craft. With the advent of modern mass media, dissemination is largely disconnected from replication – a film can be viewed in many places by people who will never learn how to make one themselves (Urban 2001: 42-48). Dissemination, by contrast, remains vital even for the production of "original" creations, because these are in fact recombinations of elements taken from existing objects, without which "the new entity would have little prospect of future motion or future circulation. It would simply become incomprehensible" (Urban 2001: 5). So Urban's "metaculture of newness" is made possible through a combination of pathways of dissemination independent of replication (i.e. media technology allowing mechanical reproduction) with the availability of people skilled in reworking circulating objects into productions that will be recognized as new.

For analyzing how Soviet and evangelical methodicians form their publics, Urban's insistence on the need to attend to pathways of dissemination is a valuable insight. But his identification of a metaculture of newness with an exclusive emphasis on the dissemination of mechanically reproduced objects needs to be modified somewhat. Replication by human agents through internalized skills remains important in both the Soviet and evangelical context, because the technical tools of mechanical reproduction

are not always available, but also because of the stronger bonds forged through personal transmission from teacher to pupil. The existence of such bonds makes Soviet and evangelical "publics" more externally directed than classical analysts of the autonomous public sphere would allow for. But in both cases, external direction – through state and party in the Soviet case, denominational authorities in the evangelical – is able to make do with surprisingly limited resources. Each public is able to extend its reach through creative combinations of mechanical dissemination of didactic materials and personal replication. A combination of material limitations and pedagogical theory thus forges the "potent combination of external influence and radical local adaptation" that David Martin (1990: 282) has noted for Pentecostals and that is present in Soviet educational networks as well.

The lecture title that recurs in the minutes of the assemblies is a good examples of the limited mechanisms of external control that were at the disposal of the institutions in charge of Soviet propaganda. As I noted above, lectures at all assemblies had a single topic, and at least some of the lecturers had received training in how to deliver it at the House of Political Enlightenment, a facility established under the aegis of the regional party committee and recipient of methodical literature from agencies higher up the pyramid of dissemination.

Lists of recommended lecture titles appear frequently in the archival records of organizations such as the Knowledge Society and party departments of propaganda and agitation, and also in methodological literature.[39] While full lecture texts were also

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[39] An example of methodological literature from the Mari Republican Library containing lecture titles is Nekhoroshkov 1964: 52-54; 1967: 21-23. The latter work also contains sample "plans" of lectures and sample invitations to evenings of questions and answers; Novoselova 1959 contains both plans for such evenings and a full text of a lecture by A. Krasnov on "The origin and essence of Mari religious cults."

printed and circulated,[40] lists of titles were printed more systematically and in larger

editions. In 1955, the All-Union Knowledge Society printed 600 copies of a three-page

list of recommended topics of lectures on scientific-atheist propaganda.[41] In 1959, 25,000

copies of an expanded four-page list were printed. Number six among the seventy-one

titles is "The communist education of the toilers and the overcoming of religious

prejudices at the present stage,"[42] the title of the lecture delivered at the assemblies in

Joshkar-Ola. The list was updated and expanded in 1961, when 93 titles were proposed to

the presidium of the All-Union Society.[43] New titles such as "The dignity of the person

and religion" or "Brain and consciousness" presented calls to the regional divisions to

identify suitable lecturers who might deliver lectures on these topics. Mimeographed lists

circulated by the Mari division of the Society are shorter than the ones printed in

Moscow, and presumably reflect those lectures someone was able to deliver locally (fig.

3.3).

Like the RSFSR and All-Union societies, the Mari division also disseminated full

lecture texts in editions of several hundred copies, but the very fact that this effort was

reduplicated on the regional level shows that texts from the center were not available for

all lectures, or had to be adapted to local conditions.[44] The reproduction of dogmatic

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[40] The minutes of the meetings of the scientific-methodical council on scientific atheism of the RSFSR division of the Knowledge Society, which I surveyed between 1958 and 1975 (GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, passim), most typically involve the discussion of one or two "brochures" – lecture texts that had been recommended for publication.

[41] GARME, f. 737, op. 2, d. 69, l. 89-92 (Exemplary topics for lectures on questions of scientific-atheist propaganda for 1955).

[42] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 284, l. 1 ob. ("Primernaja tematika lektsij po nauchnomu ateizmu," Moscow: Znanie, 1959).

[43] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 482 ("Tematika lektsij po nauchnomu ateizmu na 1961 g.," 90 copies printed for presentation to the presidium of the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge.

[44] A comparison between the numbers of recommended lecture titles and the numbers of brochures printed per year makes it very unlikely that full texts could have been available for all lectures. For 1958, for instance, the publication plan of the RSFSR division of the Knowledge Society included ten brochures on

orthodoxy within the system of propaganda lectures thus hinged on the ability of local intermediaries to interpret the intentions behind lecture titles and draw on titles and other circulating materials to produce new versions in front of their audiences.

The difference between circulating full texts or titles lies in the different requirements each makes of the people who transmit them. While both lecture titles and lecture texts rely on replication through a speaker who performs them (an "animator" in Goffman's terms, see Goffman 1986: 520), the dissemination of printed lecture texts comes closer to the kind of independence from replication that Urban describes for film. In principle, their animator can be anyone who has the skill to read aloud, without needing to be an expert on the topic of the lecture nor proficient in any aspect of lecture-writing. Lecture titles require a much greater degree of internalization of the subject matter. But the common title also suggests an interchangeability of individual lecture performances, ensured by the circulation of methical guidelines and other supporting information.

We have seen above that such organizations as the Knowledge Society celebrated forward development and stressed the novelty of scientific discoveries and of the forms in which they themselves popularized these discoveries – in Urban's terms, they participated in a metaculture of newness. At the same time, the Society's lecturers were constrained by standards of truth that were not theirs to challenge, and often themselves asked for methical guidelines that gave clues on what would count as conformity to those standards. For combining innovation and conformity, the material shortages that

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scientific atheism, when, as noted above, a year later there were seventy-one recommended lecture titles (GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 183, l. 3-4, stenograph of a meeting in the office of the vice chairman of the Society, March 22, 1958).

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XIII. ЕСТЕСТВЕННО-НАУЧНАЯ И НАУЧНО-АТЕИСТИЧЕСКАЯ

1. Происхождение и развитие жизни на Земле.

2. Происхождение человека.

3. Наука и религия о "таинственных" явлениях человеческой психики.

4. Существует ли душа.

5. Научные предвидения и религиозные пророчества.

6. Сон и сновидения.

7. Наука и религия о необыкновенных небесных явлениях.

8. Наука и религия о Вселенной.

9. Как человек создал бога.

10. О сущности религии и преодолении религиозных пережитков.

11. Коренная противоположность науки и религии.

12. Медицина в борьбе с предрассудками, суевериями и знахарством.

13. Медицина и религия.

14. Происхождение и социальная сущность христианства.

15. Современный Ватикан, его идеология и политика.

16. Религиозное сектанство и его идеология.

17. Какая мораль нужна человеку?

18. Атеистическое воспитание в школе и семье.

19. Отношение Коммунистической партии и Советского государства к религии и церкви.

Figure 3.3: The first of two pages devoted to atheist and natural scientific propaganda from the list of recommended lecture topics of the Mari division of the Knowledge Society, 1961 (GARME, op. 2, d. 98, l. 166). Some of the titles on this page are phrased differently than on the centrally disseminated lists, but only the following page (l. 167) includes two locally added topics: "The origin and essence of paganism" and "Contemporary religious organizations and their activities on the territory of the Mari ASSR."

required reliance on human skills rather than mechanical reproduction may have been an advantage. The thousands of intermediaries whose skills were required to assemble materials, write texts, make visual aids and other props, and physically maintain venues for events formed a pool of interested participants in the circulation of propaganda discourse that almost functioned like a self-regulating public. The limits to self-regulation lay in pyramidal networks of training and evaluation which maintained standards of orthodoxy, but also offered access to new material and a new sense of proficiency.

For understanding the directed self-regulation encouraged by lecture titles, it is important to remember that, within the webs of intertextuality created through occasions of distant and face-to-face learning, titles and topics conveyed important information about the expected content of a lecture. Among post-war Soviet atheists, too explicitly value-laden titles such as "Religion – an enemy of science and progress," "The origin of Christianity and its reactionary role,"[45] or "Church weddings and their incompatibility with Soviet ideology"[46] were criticized as likely to deter believers from attending the lectures. But the more neutral approved titles still contained clues for lecturers about the argument expected from them. Many titles had a binary structure of opposed terms that lecturers with a minimal exposure to atheist literature could interpret as an invitation to show the superiority of one term over another. Among the titles on the list reproduced in fig. 3.3, examples of such a structure are 5, "Scientific predictions and religious prophecies" and 7, "Science and religion on unusual celestial phenomena," in each case suggesting an argument that demonstrates the superiority of the scientific over the

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[45] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1., d. 22, l. 8 (Information on the state of scientific-atheist propaganda for the year 1955, A.S. Vasil'ev, director of the division for scientific-atheist propaganda).
[46] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 78, l. 54-55 (Certificate of inspection of the work of the Zvenigovo district division of the Knowledge Society, June 19, 1960)

religious approach. In other titles, openly pejorative terms such as "reactionary" or "incompatibility" have been replaced by more neutral wording, leaving it to the lecturer to realize that they still needed to be critical in the body of the lecture: 14, "The origin and *social* essence of Christianity " (replacing "reactionary," emphasis mine), or, more explicit, 11, "The essential *contradiction* between science and religion" (replacing "incompatibility"). Titles phrased as questions or prompts to narrative (17, "What morality do humans need?" or 9, "How humans created god") likewise index circulating literature that provides the story to be told in the lecture.

The criticism routinely showered on younger or more provincial colleagues by experienced lecturers of the party agitation and propaganda department and the Knowledge Society who evaluated their performances suggests that the messages of titles were not always easy to interpret or to put into practice. Criticism suggests that lecturers often misjudged the kind of contextualization that was expected of them (no connection was made between the topic and the decisions of the latest party congress;[47] historical or scientific facts were simply listed without critical analysis and atheist conclusions,[48] or criticism was linked to religious customs in the past instead of the present[49]), or that they were inapt or careless in their delivery (lecturers read from a prepared text without taking

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[47] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 307, l. 48ob (Evaluation of the lecture "Crimes of minors" by comrade Kirillov, member of the Knowledge Society, Factory for Semiconductors, Joshkar-Ola, 1971).
[48] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 22, l. 11-12 (Report on the state, tasks and means for the improvement of scientific-atheist propaganda in the divisions of the Knowledge Society RSFSR, December 1955); GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 69, l. 64-65 (Review of the lecture "Origin and life of ancient man" by comrade S. Reshetov, member of the Knowledge Society, reviewed by N.A. Pomrjaskinskaja, January 1963). The latter is a review of a lecture text mailed in from a district center, not an evaluation of a lecture performance.
[49] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 20.

their eyes off the page or reformulating in their own words,[50] failed to answer audience questions,[51] or had an accent that made the delivery hard to follow[52]).

Systems of evaluation and methodical recommendations provided a way to enforce standards of truth within a public of readers and transmitters of circulating discourse. A similar tension between autonomous circulation and upheld truths exists in evangelical churches. More discretely perhaps than Soviet organizations, those churches that I visited during my fieldwork combined a local flexibility of independent congregations and individually-inspired preachers with rather rigid relations of authority through personal "discipleship." Such relations of discipleship were mediated through the circulation of books and cassettes of popular preachers, and attendance of seminars taught by them (Bartholomew 2006; Coleman 2006). Similar to lectures in the Knowledge Society, sermons in evangelical churches are often identified by a title and become an entity for circulation and replication by preachers who consider themselves disciples of the pastor who originally delivered it.

As Susan Harding notes, preachers "may borrow aggressively from one another, appropriating exegeses, illustrations, stories, quotations, logics, style, tone, gestures, and even entire sermons without citation," since among them "piracy is not a vice, it is a virtue" (Harding 2000: 24). But such piracy is not random, since "whom they [preachers] choose to imitate and impersonate" matters a great deal, not only for "their audience and their reach," as Harding says (ibid.), but also for the relations of discipline and authority

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[50] GARME, f. P-1, op. 18, d. 245, l. 33 (Information on the state of party education as of the beginning of the 1959-1960 academic year, Regional Committee instructor Putilova, November 1959); GARME, f. P-22, op. 1, d. 33, l. 46-62 (Report on the work of the nine-month courses of requalification for party and state workers under the Mari regional committee for 1951-52).
[51] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 443, l. 225 (Minutes of the board meeting of the Mari regional division of the Knowledge Society, December 19, 1950).
[52] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 307, l. 48ob.

in which preachers place themselves (Bartholomew 2006: 5). The personalization of such relationships to well-known preachers through borrowings from their sermon titles and texts allow supposedly non-denominational evangelical churches to maintain conformity without placing much emphasis on explicitly formulated doctrine.

The story of how the young pastor of the Joshkar-Ola Christian Center aligned his church with the Kievan Embassy of God via Moscow's Triumphant Zion illustrates how the circulation of texts mediates relations of spiritual authority. In addition to the books and tapes by Sunday Adelaja and Aleksandr Dzjuba sold at the Christian Center's book stall, the young pastor passed on their teachings in the form of named sermons. For instance, a sermon delivered by Pastor Aleksandr Dzjuba from Triumphant Zion during his visit to Joshkar-Ola in September 2005 was entitled "How to graft yourself onto the grace of the church." Announcing the topic, he asked everyone to take out pen and paper and take notes, and invited the pastors among the audience (who had come from other churches in the Volga region in addition to the pastor of the Christian Center) to "take this sermon for yourself" if they wanted to.[53] At the Christian Center, this had already happened a little more than two months earlier, when the young pastor preached on a similar topic ("Grafting yourself onto His grace") in his Wednesday sermon, addressed mainly to people who considered themselves "leaders" within the church.[54] Through taking Dzjuba's sermons for himself, the young pastor served as an animator of Dzjuba's message, and drew authority from his association with the metropolitan pastor.

Both sermon performances offered advice on how to act toward spiritual authority, especially when encountering differences between congregations and between

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[53] Taped conference sermon, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 10, 2005.
[54] Taped sermon, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, June 26, 2005 (copied from a tape made by a member of the church).

pastors. Within this common theme, there were interesting differences in emphasis indexing the unequal relationship between the two speakers and their churches. Both versions of the title were taken from Romans 11, 17-18a: "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches." The sermon thus applied Paul's reflections on the proper attitude of the newly converted gentiles (the "wild olive shoot") toward the Jews as the original people of God ("the olive tree") to the situation of Charismatic churches within the landscape of more established denominations and of newcomers to one particular church in relation to its established members and leaders.

The related titles indicate the circulation of common themes, and the young pastor in Joshkar-Ola made it no secret that he was closely following the sermons of "his pastor," Dzjuba, on tapes and through visits to the "leadership schools" Dzjuba taught at Triumphant Zion. On several occasions, he referred to his activity as passing on the "bread" which he received in Moscow and Kiev to his congregation in Joshkar-Ola, or as passing on the torch in a relay race.[55] The commonality between both sermon performances starts with Bible verses referred to: both develop themes from Mark 2, 22a ("And no one puts new wine into old wineskins") to discuss the need to lay aside old experiences in order to appreciate the message of a new pastor or a newly joined church. It includes a common plotline, in which slightly humorous stories about proper behavior in other denominations illustrate the point about respect for the rules of a particular congregation as a precondition for participating in its "grace" (fig. 3.4). Finally, similarities extend to performative techniques. Dzjuba and the young pastor both enacted the message about the proper attitude of discipleship in the church with a small role play:

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[55] Taped sermon, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, July 3, 2005.

Quoting James 4, 6 ("God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble"), Dzjuba

had the band leader who had accompanied him from Moscow come up and enact a skit in

which the musician was introduced as a proud person and Dzjuba pushed him back,

showing how God opposes such people. The young pastor had referred to the same verse

and enacted the skit with one of his ushers. Both pastors thus chose someone serving in

their own church in a position subordinate to themselves to demonstrate the point.

Figure 3.4: Two sermon variants, developing the theme of the measure of grace of individual churches.

Aleksandr Dzjuba, September 10, 2005, "How to graft yourself onto the grace of the church:"
Each church has been provided by God with its own grace (*nadelena svoej blagodatju*). And this grace is linked to the mission of the church. Each church has its own. When I repented, my mum was a Baptist. My first desire – well, to lead her out of that slavery, that is, to lead her out of the Baptist church. Mama, how can you go there? I went there to the Baptist church, they started to praise God, I came in right away like a Charismatic, hallelujah! [laughter in the congregation] One of their deacons came up to me and stepped on my foot just like that, and I went on lalalalala [raising his arms], thinking I'd show those Baptists [more laughter], he came up to me and stepped on my foot, I didn't understand. He said put down your arms, here we don't do it that way. And I closed my eyes, but suddenly no one else is singing praise and all are looking at me [more laughter, some words incomprehensible]. And I had come thinking to promote my church. But then I understood that I couldn't do anything there. And then, after a few years, God explained to me that I shouldn't change them, that it's a stupid task. There are people for whom – mum for instance, she comes into the church, sits down, and after fifteen minutes her eyes are closed. At most if someone is wakeful, well perhaps after half an hour everyone is asleep. The pastor comes out, and half an hour is enough to put everyone to sleep. I understood that there are people who, well, this makes them happy, they want to get some sleep somewhere [laughter], why force them to clap their hands, let them just go to the Baptists [laughter], why force them. I don't fight over people, because I have understood that the grace of God is on that church too. And this grace carries with it a particular mission.

Young pastor of the Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, June 26, 2005, "Grafting yourself onto His grace:"
Many people ask: There has been some experience in life, there has already been some experience. Even when someone first comes to God. I think that it is a rare person who hears about God for the first time. Probably there is already some knowledge, that here I know this is the way to pray, this is the way to praise God, or this is the way to read the

Bible. That is we already know somehow this is the way to act. And always any church, we have already said, carries its own particular grace. Any church. Remember, we said that in the Orthodox Church, they have their grace, everything is calm, everything is quiet, there is such quiet there. And, for example, there are Baptist churches, also a Christian church, they also have their own grace, they dig in deeper in the Word, know the Bible better. So they have more in this somehow. You have to wear a headscarf there by all means. Among the Orthodox a cross. They have their traditions. That is their own grace, their traditions, their teachings, each church has its own characteristics, each church has its own particular measure of grace.

And each minister has his[56] own particular measure of grace. For instance, I meet with many other ministers, and I understand, for instance this week I met with a young Orthodox guy, we talked, and he serves in the Orthodox Church. And when we talked, I felt that God is present in him [laughs]. God is in him. He wants to prove to me that I don't believe correctly, but I can see that God is in him, simply there are some things that he has not understood. Every time I talk to Orthodox people I get upset afterwards, and *they* are calling *us* sect after all that [laughter in the congregation]. If we really take the definition of a sect, well the Orthodox are it, if there is truth in that definition, it's them in the original.

There. And, for example, different churches, for instance I see Baptist ministers, I see that God is there too. God is there too. There. Now if you take the Pentecostal church, God is there too. The Lutheran church, there is a Lutheran congregation here in town, God is there too. God is there too. There are many churches where God is present, and God, where he is, gives to the church, gives to the ministers, a certain measure of grace. All have grace, but the Bible says the measure, the measure is different for all. The measure of this grace is different. Grace is diverse (*mnogorazlichnaja*). Here such, there such. And often people, having become accustomed to a particular grace, they come for example to another church, or to another minister, and encounter a different grace. And often people may not understand correctly. It seems that God is there too, but it somehow a different kind of grace. More impulsive, more … It's simply another kind of grace. You must say simply Praise God, if you have brought me here, then my task is what? To graft myself onto this grace, that is to graft myself, become a part of this grace. Graft yourself onto this grace. If God brought you into a Baptist church, then you have to prepare I don't know, a big Bible which is full of notes, well among us too, but there everything revolves around that, for praise you have to supply yourself with a hymn book, among the Orthodox perhaps you have to bring a cushion so as not to fall asleep there [laughter], that is all of them have their own grace, that is their own measure of grace, you understood that, yes?[57]

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[56] In Russian, *svoja*, a reflexive possessive pronoun indicating the gender of the possessed rather than the possessor. I translate it as "his" because the ministers in the Christian churches in Joshkar-Ola were all male at the time of my fieldwork, although female ministers were allowed in Triumphant Zion and the Embassy of God, the churches in Moscow and Kiev with which the Christian Center was affiliated.

[57] I have inserted paragraphs into this quotation for easier reading, they do not reflect longer pauses or other particular features of the oral performance.

Differences between the two performances lie in those aspects that index the

relationship of each speaker to the sources of the sermon's authority and to the

congregation addressed (which in both cases is the Christian Center in Joshkar-Ola). The

young pastor introduced his sermon as being addressed primarily to people "who have

come from a different church," Dzjuba as deserving the special attention of people "from

this church," placing himself as an outsider critically commenting on the many changes

in leadership the Christian Center had undergone. Dzjuba's call for people who like to

sleep in church to "just go to the Baptists" (fig. 3.4) may also be understood as a

comment on the congregation. Dzjuba and the husband-and-wife team of musicians he

had brought with him had spent much of the weekend criticizing the members of the

Christian Center for being too passive in their responses to praise music, thus missing out

on part of the grace offered by the church. While Dzjuba thus takes on a position of

someone who evaluates the congregation as a whole, the young pastor speaks to the

problems of those individuals within it who move between churches and "may not

understand correctly" what it means that God has brought them to this particular church.

Dzjuba also takes on the position of outside evaluator in relation to the young

pastor. In his rendering of the sermon at the Christian Center, Dzjuba calls him a bearer

of new grace, for whom the congregation has to provide new wineskins, leaving behind

old knowledge. While thus throwing his support behind the young pastor, Dzjuba also

calls him a *porjadochnyj chelovek* (literally "orderly person"), a rather unenthusiastic

term of praise denoting trustworthiness and respectability, but no outstanding qualities.

Finally, both pastors demonstrate their different relationship to their common

"apostle," Sunday Adelaja in Kiev, in an anecdote they tell to illustrate how not to behave

toward of authority. Both use the example of an unsuccessful Ukrainian pastor who came to Kiev to consult with Sunday Adelaja but, instead of listening to the more experienced and more successful minister, started to offer him advice. Dzjuba frames this story as his personal experience with a friend whom he introduced to Adelaja, while the young pastor tells it as a story he heard from the protagonist (the unsuccessful pastor) at the latest fast he attended in Moscow. This indicates that there are several reasons for similarities between both performances. The young pastor was probably familiar with a prior version of Dzjuba's sermon which he heard in Moscow or on tape. But he had also had other opportunities to hear some of the same stories on which Dzjuba drew, through being part of the same network of seminars, tapes, literature, and joint worship. The differences between the two renderings, for their part, anchor each performance in a chain of transmission in which the speakers and their congregations stand in a relationship of authority and submission.

Within the Knowledge Society as well as in evangelical churches, chains of transmission are also chains of authority, constituted through teaching and emulation. This may help explain why it would be effective to circulate loose associations of titles, illustrative examples, and methodical tools, rather than disseminating full texts or simply relying on mass media transmission of full performances. For the case of Soviet propaganda, one explanation lies in the limitations of the socialist "economy of shortage" (Kornai 1992), which forced the state to use its resources of paper, ink, printing presses, and rolls of film and tape judiciously. But radio and later television presented technological possibilities for reaching unionwide audiences with a centrally scripted message. In Soviet propaganda as in evangelical proselytism, personal transmission

through people who have internalized the generative rules of ideological discourse remains at least a necessary supplement to dissemination through the mass media.

Soviet-era advice manuals for lecturers show that the emphasis on personalized reproduction was not exclusively a question of the scarcity and cost of mechanically reproduced media. In fact, the advice books sometimes have a rather defensive tone, emphasizing that although some people may think that there is no place for lecturers in a world of radio, film and television, the "living word" (*zhivoe slovo*) is still of crucial significance. Methodological works stressed the dialogical character of a lecture, where "the speaker (*vystupajushchij*) and the listeners (*slushateli*) enrich each other with their knowledge and impressions" (Tjapkin 1970: 3), as the lecturer responds directly to counterarguments and questions from the audience (Berkov 1976: 24-25). Such works also pointed to the flexibility with which oral content could be adapted to a particular situation in order to "more precisely satisfy the interests and needs of particular groups of the toilers" (Solomonik 1972: 13); and to the relationship of trust and authority that could be built between a locally known and respected lecturer and the audience (Chernykh 1967: 23).

All these factors made unmediated speech a crucial vehicle in what one author summarized as the inner logic and goal of propaganda: "capture the interest, explain, convince" (Tjapkin 1970: 5). Especially in long-term class interactions between a propagandist and an audience, the propagandist was also expected to "activate the listeners" (Gorokhov 1974: 50), to encourage them to participate in the process of knowledge transmission through presentations, disputes and research. A common measure for the success of such "activation" was the number of listeners who became

agitators and propagandists themselves, indicating the pyramid, snow-ball structure of transmission that this educational system was geared toward, quite similar to the one that operates in the cell-group structure of evangelical churches (Chernykh 1967: 24; Gorokhov 1974; Moiseevskaja 1961; Vershlovskij and Lesokhina 1968).

Among provincial evangelicals, resources are also important, but so is the question of activation. In 2003, for instance, Joshkar-Ola's Baptist church together with the Charismatics became involved in the project "There is Hope" (*Nadezhda Est'*) sponsored by the Rebirth (*Vozrozhdenie*) Foundation in Moscow, an organization funded by the American televangelist Billy Graham. The foundation promised to supply volunteers in Russian cities with series of video cassettes and, if necessary, video players free of charge, so that they could invite their relatives, neighbors and acquaintances to watch the evangelizing programs that were being produced specifically for Russian audiences. Personal evangelizing was thus combined with mass-mediatized appearances of such international and national celebrities as televangelist Billy Graham and actor-director Nikita Mikhalkov. In a training seminar for prospective participants, local organizers explained that this strategy was based on the realization that people convert through personal relationships, not when they are alone in front of a television screen or at a mass event in a stadium.[58]

The problem faced by lecturers as well as evangelists is how to manage mass mediatized dissemination in such a way that it creates an actively engaged *public*, not the

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[58] Field notes on joint Baptist/Charismatic seminar held in the Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, June 28, 2003. Comparable combinations of mediatized and personal transmission have been described for practices of televangelism in North America and Brazil (Birman 2006; Bretthauer 2001). Simon Coleman links these strategies to the need for "scriptural incarnation" in order to animate a written tradition (Coleman 2000: 133). One might ad that, according to the missionary theory transmitted at the 2003 seminar, images also need to be "incarnated" in concrete social relationships.

notoriously similar *masses* of passive, isolated spectators (Habermas 1965). But in the way they approach this problem, there is an important difference between late Soviet propagandists and post-Soviet evangelists: among the latter, the power of the "living word" lies not just in interpersonal interactions, but in the ability of the speaker to tap into divine inspiration. But in both spheres, the methodicians conveying the "living word" rely on a combination of personal qualities and external authority.

Inspired teachings

The tendency to both personalize media transmissions and sanctify teaching materials was most pronounced during courses of the Institute in Basic Life Principles, an American organization that operates internationally. The Institute's courses on Christian ethics consist of video demonstrations of taped seminars held by founder Bill Gothard (b. 1934) in the 1980s, combined with questions and discussions led in person by the instructor who travels from the Moscow office to a local sponsoring church.

During the course I observed in Joshkar-Ola, jointly organized by two Baptist congregations, the function of the instructor was in part to test audience comprehension – the course ended with an exam that qualified those who passed it to become instructors for the institute. He also seemed to play a gatekeeping role concerned with making sure no one saw the videos out of sequence or outside of the institutional setting where the local church was paying course fees to the institute. The course offered in Joshkar-Ola during my fieldwork was the second part of a sequence, and when I asked for permission to sit in, the instructor, an expatriate American, said that normally he did not allow people to see the second part without having seen the first, because they might not properly

understand. He also explained that making tape recordings was forbidden, and the participants of the course had to promise not to circulate photocopies of the supplementary materials they received.[59]

A discussion in a Bible study group I attended regularly showed that participants interpreted these prohibitions as based in more than monetary considerations of copyright. The leader of the group, who had participated in the Institute's course, refused to let a member copy the lesson on anger management. She first defended the prohibition by citing the copyright of the organizers, but the irate member challenged her: "So where was the copyright of the Apostle Paul?" She added that if these materials circulated freely, the Orthodox might take them for their own missionary ends. Besides, one should not study them out of sequence, because God always gave knowledge in the order in which it is necessary to a person.[60]

Here, considerations of copyright and inter-confessional competition were mixed with a view of the sacred character of instructional materials. The framing of lessons included the creation of a particular state of mind to prayer, suggesting that it was impossible to correctly process the information offered outside of this frame. At the beginning of each class, the instructor called upon a participant to say a prayer, and on the videos, Gothard also prayed at the beginning and end of each taped lesson. I encountered a similar attitude toward instructional materials as requiring reverential treatment when I asked the band leader of the Christian Center for copies of the lessons on principles of praise and worship music she had put together. She gave me the materials, but said that they had been written "in the Spirit" (i.e. by people who had

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[59] Field notes, April 14, 2005.
[60] Field notes, April 19, 2005.

invoked the presence of the Holy Spirit through prayer and praise singing) and that I should read them as I would the Bible, preparing myself through prayer and asking God to show me the meaning of the text.

Such reading practices depend on people having been socialized into them through study groups, sermons, and other type of instruction (cf. Crapanzano 2000; Luhrmann 2004), again tying the dissemination of media to personal internalization.[61] Simon Coleman (2000: 171-172) calls attention to the injunctions to respond through prayer and pledges included in many evangelical instructional materials, and argues that the aim is to effect a bodily appropriation of the teacher's words by the student. Turning this argument around, one could say that through suggesting appropriate responses, the creators of instructional materials appropriate the future-oriented thrust of the learning process to themselves by directing the future activity of the student. In a comparable way, the idea of the "activation" of the learner in Soviet literature implied that higher agencies would set the direction of this activity. But in Soviet didacticism, instructional materials never became the focus of personal relationships between those who created them and those who used them.

In an organization like the Knowledge Society, lectures were considered less the property of their individual authors than a complex of skills and knowledge needed to deliver them. The effort required by the lecturer in working with titles and full lecture texts was not to provide an incarnation of a known author, but to adapt impersonal knowledge to an interpersonal encounter between lecturer and audience. "We give the brochure to you, the lecturer, so that you can rework (*pererabotali*) the material and in

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[61] Compare Charles Hirschkind's (2006) insightful account of the forms of sociality and disciplines of listening in which the circulation of Islamic sermon tapes in Cairo is embedded.

your own way perhaps reformulate (*pereskazali*) that which is there, using first and

foremost local, concrete, factual material," said section chairman Khudjakov at the 1956

seminar on atheist propaganda from whose transcript I quoted at length in the previous

chapter.[62] When I asked a long-time lecturer at the planetarium of the Mari division of the

Knowledge Society how she used lecture brochures (*broshjurki*, *razrabotki*), she sketched

the process of supplementing the skeleton of a printed lecture – whether written by

herself or centrally disseminated – to appeal to a diversity of audiences:

> You know, when you go on a lecture, you have 45, 50 minutes for the lecture,
> yes? But material you need to have for all of three, four hours, as I say. Because
> they can ask you any question, especially with this topic. And when I for instance
> wrote lectures, here I have "The Columbusses of the universe," and there it's
> mainly about religion and science, we even had such a topic in second grade. We
> were not allowed to print much, the norm was eighteen pages. So, eighteen pages,
> that is just the very minimal core, as they say, but for every one of your sentences
> there must be examples, yes, or some kind of strong evidence, or you even take
> evidence not from scientific literature, but from life. That is, depending on who is
> sitting in front of you. There, that's what you look at. I delivered many lectures in
> my life, in 30 years here I delivered perhaps 15,000 lectures, and those are only
> the paid ones. And on top of that you do a lot of traveling through the districts
> without pay, yes? And so you always need to have more material in your head
> than in these worked-out versions (*v etikh razrabotkakh*).

The authority of the "worked-out versions" was based in the scientific credentials of their

authors, not in personal fame:

> These *razrabotki*, methodical aids for the lecturer they were called, yes? For
> example, when I worked in a school myself, this is how these *razrabotki* helped
> me. Approximately I already know, this was written by people with a doctorate,
> scholars, specialists. I already know approximately what I need to talk about. It's
> only the base, and then you take everything yourself, either from life, or from
> fiction, from scientific literature. So I had such [a topic of] unusual celestial
> phenomena, eclipses, all of this you explain and bring examples from the local,

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[62] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 65, l. 192 (Stenogramm of an All-Russian seminar of the chairmen of
scientific-atheist and natural-scientific sections of the regional and ASSR divisions of the Society for the
Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, January 10, 1956).

you ask people. That's why I love to talk to people (*obshchat'sja s ljud'mi ljublju*), because you can learn a lot from them.[63]

Instead of carrying on personal insights like torches in a relay race, the lecturer mediates between universal, impersonal science and the local knowledge that emerges in personal encounters. Lecturers of the republican and district divisions of the Knowledge Society were often schoolteachers, physicians, or other low-level members of the intelligentsia. From this lecturer's narrative one senses both her sense of satisfaction with being considered a knowledgeable specialist by her diverse audiences, and her respect for the "people with a doctorate, scholars, specialists" whose work she drew on.

The same mix of pride and deference is evident in the recollections of a friend and colleague of the planetarium lecturer, who was present at the same interview and looked back on forty years of experience delivering lectures on sects and communist morality. Working as a teacher of history and geography, she had become involved in the Knowledge Society when two custodians in her school were found to be members of the Seventh Day Adventists. She was assigned by her school party cell to do "individual work" with them, and went to the Society for help. Invited to work as a lecturer, she "took the topic sectarians." "I went to the sects, attended [their services], the regional [party] committee sent me, and I also went on my own initiative, now I still go." The emphasis on self-direction in her memories of her work contrasted with the process of evaluation that every lecture had to go through before a lecturer was allowed to deliver it in public. The performance had to be evaluated by a board of "scholars," a word she particularly stressed in her account, implying perhaps a sense of dread, but also of pride at the association:

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[63] Taped interview, January 31, 2006.

> Fifteen people sitting there, you read your lecture, the first time they did not pass me, this and that and that you have to do, after all they are scholars, and the second time they said that it's okay to deliver this lecture.[64]

Asked if she memorized the text, this lecturer said no, she simply glanced at it for numbers, but otherwise spoke freely. While not all lecturers may have developed as much lasting interest in their work as these two, the opportunity for self-education through access to expert knowledge, combined with constant evaluation of how one played the expert role towards others, helps understand why propaganda work in the Soviet Union was not always a boring or predictable task for those who were engaged in it.

As we have seen above, lecturers and other methodicians dealt with lists of topics rather than detailed texts and lesson plans. This meant that they had little way of knowing how their work would be evaluated, except that the creativity with which they filled the gaps would be part of the evaluation. A woman who had led Komsomol study circles in the 1980s remembered choosing topics each term from a list of recommendations. What she did with the topic then was largely up to her, and she said that it was welcomed when propagandists supplemented the materials provided in Komsomol brochures by searching for additional information in journals and literature.[65] The Baptist Bible study leader who had been the propagandist in charge of political study in her childcare work collective remembered being told to do atheist propaganda, without concrete instructions on how to do it. Her solution was to search through journals for materials on sectarians and create a

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[64] Taped interview, January 31, 2006. Both of these elderly women (one in her seventies, the other in her eighties) still considered themselves to be lecturers, and the younger one had kept the planetarium open without pay for the past decade, still delivering lectures to school and university groups there. The other was not actively lecturing anymore, complaining that the work of the Knowledge Society was falling apart for lack of government support – "it is easier to rule over dark [ignorant] people." When describing themselves as having been lecturers for thirty and forty years, both women counted the decade and a half since 1991, in which at least one of them had done little active lecture work.
[65] Field notes, August 29, 2006.

wall newspaper called "The Sticky Spider's Web" out of cut-outs and text copied from relevant articles.[66]

Whether conveying the insights of inspired individuals or the collective discoveries of science in the service of socialist construction, the intertextuality of materials for long-distance and face-to-face training provided a dense, but never unambiguous web of information for Soviet and evangelical methodicians. A particularly easily transportable genre of didactic material is the list, whether it contains lecture topics, questions to discuss, or steps to take to achieve a future spiritual state. With its impression of completeness and easy replicability, the list is a methodical tool that promises to convey the complete insights of the individual or collective who designed them to all situations and all learners, providing teachers with an effective methodical tool to allow their students to become active in a directed manner.

In practice, the amount of methodological control is compromised because lists turn out to be easier to disseminate than to replicate (in Urban's sense of a recognizable reenactment that grows out of internalization). For instance, Bill Gothard's lessons for the Institute for Basic Life Principles abounded with lists – of the twelve kinds of heart of which "God speaks" in the Bible, the three ways of enlarging our heart, the thirteen steps in the development of immorality.[67] But an attempt to replicate the lists in a study group of young Baptist women showed that it is difficult to translate the direction provided by

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[66] Interview notes, July 22, 2003.

[67] Field notes, April 14, 2005. Lists of "steps" towards or away from something are common in self-transforming practices that have intersecting histories in North American religion and psychology, e.g. in secular and religious "12 steps programs" to overcome various kinds of dependency (cf. Erzen 2006). A general tendency toward quantified lists among twentieth-century evangelical Protestants has been observed by Vincent Crapanzano, who notes that his interlocutors in conservative seminaries could tell him exactly how many instances of the phrases "God said" and "Thus says the Lord" there are in the Bible, how many "prophetic topics" there are (737) and which books of the Bible contain how many instances of prophesy (Crapanzano 2000: 77, 157).

the list into classroom activity. The youngest member of the group, a middle-school student around sixteen years old, tried to replicate one of the lessons from the first part of Gothard's course, dealing with the "Principle of Creation" (*Printsip tvorenija*). The materials she had copied from the workbook consisted of two lists, one of "unchangeable characteristics" of a person and one of "signs of self-rejection." The first list was simply read by her without discussion or additions, although in the beginning she had announced that she thought there were more "unchangeable characteristics" than the ten included on the list.

Before reading the second list, the presenter tried to have the other members of the group generate it themselves by asking them what they thought the "signs of self-rejection" were. Obviously discouraged when the first volunteered answer, "people scold themselves" (*rugajut sebja*), was not an item from the list, she started to read the eleven signs together with the explanations and supporting Bible verses provided, occasionally stopping to ask the group what they thought a term meant, but quickly reverting to the explanation given in the text when what followed was silence or an answer not foreseen in the text. For instance, under point five, "self-critcism," she asked: "What is that? I mean, why?" Without waiting long for any other member of the group to answer, she continued: "No, let me explain: It is when a person always thinks, I could have done better."[68]

Such lack of uptake of student utterances by teachers is often interpreted as an expression of teacher authority in sociolinguistic analyses of classroom exchanges (Collins 1996; Mertz 2007: 54-58). But this presenter had very little authority over the other members of the group, being the only middle-school students among college-age

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[68] Field notes, April 19, 2005.

"sisters." Rather, her lack of uptake may show how she herself was constrained by the authority of curricular materials, which she sought to reproduce at the price of curtailing divergent answers.[69] Although the use of such a detailed curriculum was unusual within the evangelical churches I visited (and also, according to the memories of those I spoke to, in the practices of Soviet study circles), it shows the potential of method to come closer to the "teacher-proof" curricula developed in some forms of North American reading instruction (Collins 2003: 32), making instructors into animators of another author's message.

Soviet and evangelical methodicians work in contexts which encourage individual initiative and creativity in teaching, but hold the instructor accountable for the effects of the message transmitted and for its faithfulness to circulating models. Effect can be measured by the degree to which teachings produce changes in students that are then reflected in observable indicators, such as the increased productivity of a work collective or the growth of a church. The idea that larger social transformations depend on changes in personal habits and convictions is one reason why didactic transmission cannot rely on mechanical reproduction alone, but seeks to strengthen and direct it through person-to-person channels of replication.[70] For the instructors responsible for bringing about

[69] In a study of small claims court judges in the U.S., Conley and O'Barr (1990: 109-111; see also discussion in Mertz 2007: 171-173) equally identify "rule-based" discursive styles among judges at two ends of the continuum – among white males with formal legal training and, they argue, the most secure sense of their own authority, and among two "strict adherents" in the small sample, who treated the law as beyond their own control and therefore applied its rules strictly and formalistically. These were an African-American man and a white American woman, causing the authors to argue that this kind of formalism can be an expression of a sense of powerlessness before the materials applied rather than a sense of power towards the parties in court.

[70] One might ask to what degree even the cases of mass media and commodity circulation, which Urban treats as paradigmatic for a metaculture of newness, can rely entirely on the dissemination of mechanically reproduced forms, without person-to-person pathways along which skills and habits of viewing, listening, or consuming are replicated. Events such as Tupperware parties and group shopping tours (Berdahl 1999: 104-139), as well as interactive forms of media consumption such as letters printed in fan magazines or internet forum discussions, show that capitalist commodity and media consumption also rely on a mix of

personal changes, circulated materials and guidelines are simultaneously instruments of constraint and sources of hope for more effective and satisfying work, making these methodicians the most attentive and engaged public of ideological discourse.

Epilogue: all in vain?

This chapter has explored the power of didacticism to mobilize publics for mutually contradictory ideological projects. Though mindful of the global spread of didactic models of mobilization, my working thesis has been that Soviet efforts to engage large numbers of people in didactic activities have a lasting impact on post-Soviet religious life. During my fieldwork in 2005/06, this seemed true even beyond the bounds of evangelical Christianity. All religious groups I encountered were united in their declared focus on "enlightenment work."

Great was my surprise, then, when I returned to Joshkar-Ola in September of 2008 after an absence of two and a half years, to find both the city and the religious landscape altered by an ambitious construction project led by the republic's presidential administration (map 3). Under the label of historical reconstruction, new brick buildings were replacing Soviet public buildings and areas that had deliberately been left as green spaces by Soviet city planners. The planetarium of the Knowledge Society, located on valuable property directly across from the presidential administration, had been torn down and replaced by a large open square flanked on three sides by an office building/exhibition hall whose arched galleries were probably intended to evoke Byzantium. In the center stood a clock tower where every hour, an icon of the Mother of

mechanical dissemination and personally mediated replication, though perhaps in different proportions than the socialist and religious didacticisms discussed in this chapter.

Legend (public buildings and symbols):

- (symbol) - Chimarij center
- 19 – "Avtodor" Culture Palace – Mari Cultural Center
- (symbol) – sacred grove
- (symbol) – Public buildings
- A – train station
- B – Socio-Political Center (former House of Political Enlightenment)
- C – Presidential administration (former Republican Executive Committee)
- D – Knowledge Society Planetarium (torn down 2006)
- E – Mari Republican Theater of Opera and Ballet
- F – Central market
- G – Lenin Culture Palace
- H – Army Culture Palace
- (symbol) - factory

Legend (cult buildings):

- (symbol) - Orthodox churches
- 1 – Ascension Cathedral
- 2 – Resurrection Church (construction begun 2008)
- 3 – Church of the Holy Trinity (completed 2008)
- 3a – Church of the Annunciation (foundation laid 2008)
- 4 – Church of Our Lady of Tikhvin
- 5 – Assumption Church (completed 2006)
- 6 – Church of St. Seraphim of Sarov (construction begun 2005)
- 7 – Church of the Birth of Our Lady, Semenovka
- (symbol) - Mosque
- 8 – Sunni Mosque (1993)
- (symbol) - Protestant churches/regular meeting places
- 9 – Christian Center (former cinema "Peace") (1995)
- 10 – Korean Presbyterian Church
- 11 – Seventh Day Adventist Meeting House (ca. 1961)
- 12 – Mari Pentecostal Church (1995)
- 13 – Culture Palace of the Association of the Blind (site of Baptist services)
- 14 – Culture Palace of the Association of the Deaf-Mute (site of Neoapostolic services)
- 15 – Unregistered Baptist congregation (Council of Churches)
- 16 – Baptist Church (construction begun 2003)
- 17 – Lutheran Church of the Holy Cross (1993)
- 18 – Seventh-Day Adventist Meeting House (2003)

Map 3: Religious centers and public buildings in Joshkar-Ola, early twenty-first century. Cult buildings are marked with numbers, public buildings with letters. Large grey squares between streets represent areas of city-managed apartment buildings, the smaller-gridded areas where many of the Protestant churches are located represent so-called "private sectors," with primarily wooden houses.

God "Three Hands" rode out on a donkey and entered a mosaic depicting a church which resembled the Assumption Church in the garden behind the presidential administration, built in 2006 despite public misgivings about this gesture of preeminence for one religion in a multi-religious republic.

In addition to this transformation of the formerly unassuming environs of the government buildings, another center of construction lay along Karl Marx Street. Again to my surprise, I found that the outer shell of a new version of Resurrection Church was almost finished, built in a different style and on a smaller scale than the destroyed cathedral. Further south, on the site of a former public beach on the banks of the Little Kokshaga River, a belfry marked the construction site for a larger, completely new cathedral modeled on the Church of the Savior on the Blood in Saint Petersburg. The republican archives, formerly located on Karl Marx Street in a wooden structure built on the site of a convent that had been destroyed in the 1920s, had been moved to a residential area on the other side of the river. There were plans to reconstruct the former convent church on the old site, but suspicious citizens also assumed that at least part of the territory would be used for upscale apartments.

The funding for these church buildings came from the Ministry of Culture, and the architects in charge of designing the buildings confirmed that their outward appearance was decided by the republic's president – the plans for Resurrection church were based on photographs of a church in Saint Petersburg which the president had given the architects, along with the order to adapt the design so that it could be built entirely from local brick. Once finished, the plans had been taken to the archbishop for his

blessing.[71] Archbishop Ioann, who three years earlier had told me that the time for the physical construction of church buildings was over and the task now was to work for the enlightenment of the believers, now spoke in glowing tones about the benefits of such construction work: whenever a new church was opened, he claimed, it filled up with believers, and thus would help for the spiritual rebirth of Russia.[72] The church seemed to have a limited amount of control over its own priorities - at the same time as a whole number of churches were built in the center, the city had taken away a projected church construction site in a residential area. But apparently, Russian Orthodoxy's representative function in a project of national strength was steering the church away from didactic activities, and decreasing its dependence on the infrastructures of Soviet cultural institution, a dependence which remained palpable for the other religious groups.

In addition to churches, construction projects included shopping centers on the river bank and a commercial "center for children's entertainment" at the site of the open-air theater in the park. Whatever the precise economical and political motivations for this project of reconstruction were, it showed that the government was increasingly unwilling to invest resources in the auditoriums and open-air podiums that had been sites of Soviet cultural enlightenment work. As post-Soviet Marij El turned toward a more profit-oriented economy, the erosion of secularist public culture thus increased differences between religious confessions: while more Orthodox churches were being built in the city center than the diocese seemed likely to be able to staff, Protestant congregations still struggled to rent auditorium space or gathered in the less prestigious sectors of old, privately owned houses at the edges of town, and chimarij activities were still being

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[71] Interview notes, September 18, 2008.
[72] Taped interview, September 22, 2008.

coordinated from the Culture Palace of the Road Construction Authority. In this situation, didactic networks reveal their double-edged character: with their flexibility and ability to deal with material scarcity, they are suitable for situations of political marginality and economic or moral precarity. But through their association with former Soviet power and projects of translocal mobilization, they also promise a way out of this marginality to former or future glory. The following chapter presents a case study of an attempt to harness the power of didacticism by a religious group that relies most heavily on the infrastructure left behind by Soviet secular culture: chimarij Pagans.

Chapter 4

Marginal lessons: Spiritual security in the countryside

In the previous chapter, I have tried to show that relationships of teaching and learning provide a powerful way of recruiting peripheral participants into ideological publics. The populist mass mobilizations of the Khrushchev period were made possible through the existence of networks of training and dissemination within the Communist Party and mass organizations such as the Knowledge Society, all of which relied on pyramidal structures in which centers on different levels supplied their peripheries with training opportunities and materials. During the Brezhnev era, the political importance of popular mobilization waned, but the training networks continued to mobilize methodicians to participate in the circulation and application of purportedly new forms and methods. After the demise of the Soviet Union, didactic networks have lost some of their party and government sponsors, but remain a familiar way of forging translocal connections for increasingly isolated peripheries.

This chapter explores attempts by chimarij activists to reproduce a centralized, pyramidal structure in building up its own training networks. I interpret these attempts as a sign of the enduring commonsense status of the Soviet model of didactic mobilization, even for people to whose aims it might seem uncongenial. Chimarij practice, impossible without rural sacred sites and the ritual expertise of rural residents, would seem to require

a different valuation of the countryside than was the case in either Soviet didacticism or in post-Soviet capitalist development.

The spatial dynamics of didacticism

In Soviet instructional networks, rural areas were recipients, rather than sources, of instruction and care. Soviet agitbrigades sent out to the countryside to promote a speedy harvest often reported back the wishes and grievances of rural dwellers, showing how instruction and requests for resources traveled along the same pathways, but in opposite directions.[1] Even in the narratives of methodicians who worked with rural audiences across relatively small social distances, because they had themselves grown up in a village or even still lived in one, there was a sense that knowledge and care moved from administrative centers to their relative peripheries. The elderly lecturers for the Knowledge Society talked about lecturers being "sent out" to the districts, and the Lutheran deacon praised the Knowledge Society for its services to the countryside of the kind that no one cared to provide any more after the collapse of the Soviet Union. A rural schoolteacher in her thirties remembered how her father, an elementary school principal and member of the Knowledge Society, set out on foot rain, shine, or snow for early-morning lectures at outlying complexes of the collective farm in whose central settlement

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[1] GARME, f. P-12, op. 14, d. 13, l. 1-2 (Information on the course of public presentations by the district group of politinformers, leading workers of the district, and of the group of lecturers of the CPSU district committee in Morki district, September 20, 1971); "Vneshtatnye instruktory – upora rajkoma," *Marijskaja Pravda,* August 21, 1960, p. 2. Agitbrigades traveled in particular during summer agricultural work, presenting short lectures and concerts in the fields at a time when urban youth were on vacation and rural workers were assumed to be in need of extra motivation for work. I found numerous photographs documenting their work in the albums on cultural work which I discuss in the next chapter. Their work was also described in newspaper articles, e.g. "Rajonnyj smotr agitbrigad," *Put' k kommunizmu*, March 11, 1972, p. 1; "K vam priekhal agitpoezd," *Marijskaja Pravda*, August 16, 1972, p. 2-3.

the family resided. Didactic activities thus had a spatial direction in which the town was the giving center and the countryside the receiving periphery.

Post-Soviet legal reforms lifted the prohibitions that formerly kept urban-based religious organizations from adopting a similar format for rural outreach. The Lutheran satellite congregation in Shuar-Sola is an attempt of a Protestant church to establish its own network, creating two-way pathways between town and country. Laypeople from Shuar-Sola travel to Joshkar-Ola to receive training as youth workers, Sunday school teachers, or humanitarian aid workers, while the deacon, cantor, and a changing contingent of congregational youth from Joshkar-Ola board the church's minibus every Sunday evening to conduct the service in Shuar-Sola, sometimes bringing loads of donated clothing from Finland, and sometimes taking back sacks of potatoes. But at the time of my fieldwork, only one other Protestant congregation was investing a comparable amount of effort in the countryside. The others concentrated their limited human and financial resources on evangelizing in the city.

The Orthodox Church also uses busses to transport rural teachers to receive training at the diocesan center, which, in Marij El as in many other republics and regions of the Russian Federation, is identical with the seat of regional government. But for Orthodox Christians, town-country relationships are somewhat more complicated: while rural residents are considered to be in need of enlightenment and material aid from urban church institutions, the countryside is also the realm of holy sites and monasteries that attract urban dwellers as pilgrims seeking to receive, rather than missionaries seeking to direct and transform.[2]

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[2] See Kormina 2006 for a sensitive analysis of the divergent spiritualities and views of community encountering each other at a village sacred site in northwestern Russia that is popular with urban pilgrims.

The countryside is even more central to <u>chimarij</u> Paganism. Its High Priest – a new position created in the 1990s – is the only major religious leader in the republic who lives in a village, not in the capital, and even urban adherents travel to villages in order to participate in rituals, which take place within rural households or at sacred sites associated with particular villages. But for purposes of post-Soviet reconstruction and mobilization, active adherents seem to find it necessary to establish the same structures of dissemination from city to country that are familiar from Soviet didacticism and that other religions work with.

A case in point for this process of didactization was a seminar in which I participated in July 2005, beginning in Joshkar-Ola and ending in a Mari village in Morki district. Entitled "The preservation of national immaterial culture as a means of state integrity and spiritual security," the seminar was organized by the Joshkar-Ola-based Mari Cultural Center, with funds from the Russian Ministry of Culture. The participants included employees of culture clubs and museums in addition to practicing <u>onaeng</u> or Mari priests. Invitations had gone out through the pyramid of cultural institutions, asking each district in the republic to send one or two cultural workers. In addition, cultural centers serving the Mari diaspora in Perm region, Bashkortostan, Udmurtiia and Saint Petersburg had been invited to send representatives. Joshkar-Ola thus figured in the seminar as a center of knowledge and infrastructural support for matters concerning Mari ethnic culture, much as it would have in regional seminars during the Soviet era.

The seminar coincided with dates in the rural festival calendar, but not in the spirit of competition which such timing would have signified during the times of Commissioner Nabatov and his successors, who fought village festivals as harmful to

agricultural productivity. Instead, the seminar was scheduled to allow participants to participate in the celebration of sürem, a midsummer Mari ceremony, in Morki district, where it had been held on Saint Peter and Paul's Day (July 12) since the nineteenth century (Kalinina 2003: 19; Wichmann 1913: 105). Starting in Joshkar-Ola on July 11 with lectures delivered by two Mari ethnographers in the culture palace of the republican Road Construction Authority (*Dvorets kul'tury "Avtodor"*, fig. 4.1), the seminar then turned into an excursion to the countryside. Participants were loaded on two busses and taken on the three-hour drive to Morki town, the district center, where the day ended with a concert, dinner and informal disco in the dormitory of the local technical college. On the next day, additional lectures by the same ethnographers prepared the cultural workers for norms of dress and behavior at Mari ceremonies, while the priests had already driven the remaining 30 miles to Shorun'zha village to prepare the ceremony under the

Figure 4.1: Seminar registration at the *Avtodor* culture palace, July 11, 2005.

instruction of the High Priest of the republic and the local <u>onaeng</u>. Reaching Shorun'zha toward noon (after a stop at the market to buy the headscarves that many participants had not been prepared to bring, and at the church to buy candles), the cultural workers joined another "delegation" of photojournalists from Finno-Ugric republics and a flock of journalists and visitors from all over the republic in observing-participating in the ceremony.

After the ceremony, the seminar participants visited the village's sights: the beehives, the library, and a workshop for traditional embroidery set up by the local collective farm. But at the urging of the two representatives from the federal Ministry of Culture in Moscow who were guests of honor, the delegation did not stay for the evening concert that had been prepared for them. Instead, the bulk of the participants returned to Morki, while a car took the Moscow guests back to Joshkar-Ola to catch the night train.

I spent the night in Shorun'zha at the house of the methodician of the village club, whose efforts at preparing children for the concert had come to nothing. We met the delegation again when they returned the next day for the part of the festival that involved various forms of "play," such as horse racing, blowing of ceremonial horns made from elm bark to drive out evil spirits before the coming harvest, and a long procession along a village street led by women from the local folk choir. The procession stopped frequently to partake of the food that the households along the street had put out on long tables in front of their gates.

On this day, the visible master of ceremonies was the chairman of the collective farm,[3] whose birthday was on Peter and Paul's Day and who was widely credited with

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[3] Technically, at the time of my fieldwork the organization was no longer a collective farm (*kollektivnoe khozjajstvo*, or *kolkhoz* for short), but an agricultural work brigade (*sel'sko-khozjajstvennaja artel'*, or

making this kind of ceremonial life possible in Shorun'zha, but who had kept in the background during the ceremony proper, not appearing in the sacred grove. The chairman led the procession down the street and finally presided over a banquet in the collective farm's dining hall. Here he acted as *tamada*, a pan-Soviet term for the master of the table who calls on guests to pronounce toasts which inevitably included well-wishes for the many future plans of the collective farm (including the building of a hotel which would be able to host comparable seminars in the future, in addition to ecotourists and ethnographic field schools from Finland). After a group photograph on the steps of the dining hall, the delegation of cultural workers left, while the journalists stayed for another day, visiting a sacred spring and a sacred mountain in the vicinity. I also stayed behind to visit acquaintances in this village and participate in the ongoing hay gathering in neighboring Shin'sha.

Chimarij training networks

Like the workers' assemblies in 1960, the organization of this seminar required more intricate efforts than immediately met the eye. Unlike the workers' assemblies, which were organized through the well-established structures of party, state, trade-union, and Knowledge Society, the organizers of this seminar had to piece together comparable structures themselves. As noted in chapter 2, one of the striking features of chimarij efforts to institutionalize their religion is their reliance on cultural institutions shaped during the Soviet era, and this seminar presents no exception. As representatives of the

sel'khozartel'), one of several options for forms of voluntary agricultural associations that replaced mandatory state or collective farms after Yeltsin's 1993 land reform (Wegren 2005: 67-69). But in this as in other villages I visited, people referred to the new entity by the Soviet term *kolkhoz* except in very formal contexts, and I follow them in this usage.

highest central institution in charge of Mari culture, the main organizers were the methodician of the Mari Cultural Center (an organization sponsored by the republic Ministry of Culture) and her husband, a retired army officer. In addition to organizing weekly evenings of Mari music and other forms of entertainment in Joshkar-Ola, the couple collaborated with the High Priest of the republic (who himself lived in a village in one of the far northeastern districts of the republic) to coordinate "events connected with the traditional Mari religion." The latter phrase was the title of a large hand-drawn planning chart hanging on their office wall, containing the scheduled dates of big prayer ceremonies of republic-or district-wide significance to occur in a given year.[4]

Occupying rooms on the second floor of the culture palace of the Road Construction Authority assigned to them by virtue of old acquaintance, the Center itself had a rather tenuous hold in Joshkar-Ola, but provided chimarij adherents with their only institutional base in the capital. Funding for this particular seminar had come from Moscow, and the seminar title, with its allusion to Russia-wide anxieties about perceived threats to the "security" and "integrity" of the state posed by ethnic and religious movements in places like the North Caucasus, was probably designed to make the event seem worthy of federal sponsorship. The organizers spent most of their time and energy entertaining the two guests from Moscow, riding with them in a car ahead of the two busses on the way out, and not returning for the second day of festivities after having taken the guests back to Joshkar-Ola.

Impressing people from higher up in the pyramid was one apparent purpose of the seminar. A further effect was to help establish the Mari Cultural Center as center of a network through which knowledge about chimarij religion and resources for its

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[4] Field notes, April 8, 2005.

organization circulated through the republic. The institutions that participated in the network were, as I noted above, those that had emerged in the Soviet period to serve the function of spreading cultural knowledge and cultured behavior from the cities to the countryside: the culture palace of an enterprise in the capital, district cultural administrations, and a district technical college and rural collective farm headed by a former party secretary. But different from a Soviet-era institution, the Mari Cultural Center could rely on administrative command to obtain the support of only some of these institutions. Others – the director of the *Avtodor* culture palace and the chairman of the collective farm, for example – had to be persuaded to support the project by virtue of old acquaintance or common interests.

Like the institutional supporters, the two groups of people gathered together as beneficiaries and future transmitters of the imparted knowledge made a somewhat unlikely combination: onaeng seeking to improve their knowledge of the ceremonies, and methodicians interested in Mari culture. From what I was able to learn from the organizers, the hope was that the latter might in the future organize similar ceremonies in their village or at least give positive treatment to Mari religious traditions in educational events. Through gathering and instructing onaeng, the High Priest of the republic, who was among the guests of honor greeting participants during the formal opening of the seminar in Joshkar-Ola, was asserting the authority of his own interpretation of Mari ritual, and also acting to remedy a perceived lack of experienced onaeng after the Soviet period, which disrupted former ways of learning through helping older relatives.

To remedy the effects of this disruption, the High Priest and his supporters strove to establish a didactic network that would be geared toward speedy training of specialists

in a way that I have identified with the problem of "method" and with Urban's "metaculture of newness." The High Priest sent out typed schedules with the dates of Mari festivals to village onaeng, and later told me in an interview that he hoped to establish a training center for onaeng in the hotel complex in Shorun'zha once it opened. The reasons he gave for planning to do so in a village rather than in the capital showed both his awareness of the relative weakness of the Mari religion within the confessional politics of the republic – "it's better there than in the city, so that Ioann [the Orthodox archbishop] won't see, so that it doesn't bother him" – and the primacy of the countryside for the ritual and social life of chimarij adherents – "it's better for the priests (*karty*) there."[5]

The degree to which the High Priest's authority was recognized in the republic is hard to gauge and seems to vary depending on the local onaeng. While I attended one agavajrem ceremony in a small village where the practicing onaeng claimed never to have heard of the High Priest, there was a group of 8-10 priests from different districts whom I met at several larger ceremonies through the year, and whom I saw co-officiate with the High Priest at least once. I first met most of them at a meeting of onaeng in the district center near the High Priest's home village on April 1, where they set the calendar of regional and republican prayer ceremonies for the year.

At that meeting, it became apparent that the priests were trying to recreate the pyramidal structure of Soviet administrative divisions. Their strategy, as they explained it, was to form religious organizations in individual districts and seek registration there before trying for republic-wide registration. This involved designating head priests for each district in which registration was attempted, who would be responsible for

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[5] Interview notes, February 3, 2006.

ceremonies of district or republican significance in their districts.[6] At a later occasion, the second head priest of one northeastern district, a lawyer by training, pointed out to me that this pyramid was taking effect, as the "hierarchy of ceremonies," distinguished according to their local, district, or republic-wide significance, was mirrored by a "hierarchy among *karty*," where some would only officiate in their village, some in their district, some at any place in the republic. He seemed to consider this an important achievement and told me to note it in my dissertation.[7]

In the way this man and other participants spoke about ceremonies, the distinction between village, district and republican prayer ceremonies (*mestnoe*, *rajonnoe*, and *respublikanskoe molenie*) had replaced earlier distinctions between ceremonies held by a village, an association of neighboring villages, and rarer ones designated "all-Mari" or "world" prayer ceremonies (Popov 1996). These changes may look similar to those observed by Nabatov in the late 1940s, when Mari ritual communities adjusted to the changing boundaries of collective farms. But those were local responses to decisions made by secular institutions. The new pyramids of ceremonies and specialists were attempts to direct <u>chimarij</u> practice through institutions that were specifically religious, but imitated the secular model of a didactic network.

The lessons of village life

The seminar revealed some of the challenges of this institution-building effort. It addressed three constituent groups assumed to be in need of methodically packaged knowledge about the Mari religion – superiors in the federal government and inferiors

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[6] Field notes, April 1, 2005.
[7] Field notes, November 6, 2005.

among the practicing ritual specialists and cultural workers, many of them coming to Joshkar-Ola from relatively more rural places. While this could have been the participant structure of a regional seminar in the Soviet era, the event departed from Soviet models in two ways. The first was the use of the Mari language almost throughout, except during some of the official welcoming addresses at the beginning and in the printed program – something that, as I was told repeatedly during this event and at other occasions, would never have happened during the Soviet period, when Russian would have been used to accommodate the non-Mari speakers. Second, the seminar partly took place in a rural setting that was not simply in need of guidance and aid as in Soviet didactic schemes, but whose residents and places had agency of their own to enable or obstruct the seminar's message.

In bringing rural or small-town cultural workers to observe a rural ceremony, the seminar did not easily fit into the urban-rural binaries assumed in Soviet didacticism. Since chimarij ritual is not practiced evenly in all parts of the republic, many participants had never attended a Mari ceremony before. Many of them knew so little about ritual etiquette that they had not brought the proper attire, i.e. headscarves and skirts for women and caps for men. At the same time, they did not go with an expectation to be pure observers and future teachers, but also as participants – for instance, some people expressed embarrassment when they were told on the morning of the ceremony that participants were not supposed to drink alcohol on the eve of the ceremony, when vodka had flown quite liberally at the dinner the previous evening. Two women from the district surrounding Joshkar-Ola, baptized Orthodox Christians, expressed anxiety over whether it was right for them to participate in a pagan ceremony. Doubting the ethnographer's

explanation that Tünjambal serlagysh, the Savior Above the World, and Mer jumo, the God of the World, corresponded to Jesus Christ and the Christian god, they decided that it might be better not to offer candles, coins or other offerings anywhere, but just to stand back and watch. Conflicting religious commitments only reinforced the idea that a ceremony was an occasion for participation, never purely a didactic spectacle to be observed.

The rural setting of the seminar was thus neither recipient of instruction nor simply a teaching tool. Rather, participants encountered the rural sacred place and religious practitioners as potential sources of power that had its own rules of engagement. The rural hosts also treated the ceremony as a combined occasion for self-display and for accomplishing aims that had nothing to do with the outside visitors. Parallel to the seminar, the organizers of the ceremony in Shorun'zha had accomplished their own organizational feats. Having previously visited a much smaller ceremony on Saint Nicholas's day in May attended almost exclusively by villagers,[8] I could tell that the sacred grove had been prepared for this larger occasion: a wooden gate now marked the entrance to the sacred ground, water containers had been hung nearby for visitors to wash their hands before entering the grove proper, and new wooden benches for worshipers to sit on had been put up near some of the five trees at which sacrifices were made. These preparations had been undertaken through the joint efforts of the collective farm and rural administration, as I later learned in an interview with the collective farm chairman.[9]

Walking through the village later, I also discovered a sign on the announcement board at the village bus stop, which alerted residents that the ceremony would be held

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[8] Field notes, May 22, 2005.
[9] Taped interview, July 13, 2005.

July 12 and the festivities would continue July 13, to which people were asked to appear in Mari traditional costume. My hostess in the village, who taught dance classes in the culture club, had been hard at work with her pupils preparing the concert for the evening of the twelfth, only to be told at the last moment that it was cancelled. Her sister, who lived along the street which the procession was to follow the next day, reported that she and all her neighbors had been asked to prepare tables with Mari dishes (fig. 4.2). Unsure what would qualify as a Mari dish, she was trying to remember how to prepare something the instructions explicitly asked for, a kind of custard made from creamy, heated milk.

None of these displays of traditional authenticity would have been possible without the organizational skills of Shorun'zha's leadership, and observers from within the republic were quick to acknowledge that. In conversations in Joshkar-Ola and Shin'sha, a neighboring village, Shorun'zha was often pointed out to me as a model for a village where people *zhivut druzhno*, live in unity, as friends. The way in which the collective farm and rural administration could mobilize residents to participate in community events was often treated as exceptional and as the reason for the village's ability to conserve both religious customs and a functioning agricultural collective. The collective farm chairman, who often received personal credit for this situation, also was a key liaison to institutions such as the Mari Cultural Center.[10]

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[10] Douglas Rogers (2006) reports a similar situation from Sepych, a village in Perm region, where people from neighboring villages credit the survival of Sepych state farm to the energetic and authoritative chairman, and assume that people in Sepych consequently live in better material circumstances. Interestingly, Sepych is also comparable to Shorun'zha in having a relatively strong organized religious life (in the form of a newly-build Old Believer church). Rogers finds from a survey of other villages in the region that there seems to be a correlation between surviving agricultural collectives and church construction (Rogers 2004).

Figure 4.2: Table of home-made food put out on the street for the second day of <u>sürem</u>. Photograph by Evgenij Nikiforov.

The chairman's success in mobilizing villagers, along with his connections in the city (he was a former party secretary and a deputy in the republic's parliament at the time of my fieldwork) and beyond (a Finnish researcher had brought students to Shorun'zha for an ethnographic field school for several consecutive summers) allowed people from Shorun'zha to participate in city-sponsored events from which other rural dwellers were absent. At another ceremony earlier in July at Chumbulat mountain, a sacred site in Kirov region outside of the Mari republic, virtually everyone present was an urban resident

active in <u>Mari Ushem</u>, except for a group of women and the club director from Shorun'zha, who had been brought there by a bus provided by the collective farm.[11]

While actively participating in constructing Shorun'zha's image toward superiors, the chairman practiced a studied aloofness from outside attention, as if to avoid giving the impression that he was gaining personal fame from his village's reputation. He had not attended the ceremony on Saint Peter and Paul's Day because July 12 was also his birthday, and he did not want that to take up all the attention, he explained during his speech at the concluding banquet. In this speech he also played down any role that his own planning or orders from town might have played: "No one prepared, no one summoned us from town, we sing ourselves, we dance ourselves, we distill ourselves and drink ourselves."[12] When I asked him in an interview if he thought that religious events like this one helped agriculture, he said no, they did not help agriculture, they helped the people. From this short answer, he launched into a reflection on the changes in the forms of entertainment and sociality available in post-Soviet life, by asking me if I went to the cinema. Even in Joshkar-Ola, no one could afford it now, as he claimed. "To the cinemas no one goes now, what for, for 300 rubles[13] they watch some horror movie there? We support each other, when someone is sick, when there is grief, you have to help, and we help from work. Now we live like that, it's the primitive communal order."[14]

With this reference to historical-materialist theories of social evolution, where primitive communism represents the oldest form of social organization (*pervobytno-*

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[11] Field notes, July 8, 2005.
[12] Tape of speech at final banquet, Shorun'zha cafeteria, July 13, 2005.
[13] A little over ten U.S. dollars in 2005, a sum that might well equal the entire monthly salary of a farm worker, or about half or one third the pay of a rural cultural worker. The chairman somewhat exaggerates actual ticket prices in Joshkar-Ola's cinemas, which were closer to 100-150 rubles, or 3-5 U.S. dollars, at that time. But that price, too, presented a significant expense even for city-dwellers who relied on state salaries.
[14] Taped interview, July 13, 2005.

obshchinnyj stroj), the chairman pointed to the connection between rural marginality and the attempt to reconstruct former didactic networks along religious lines. According to him, the organization of religious ceremonies was not a function of thriving town-country networks, but one of the few compensatory measures a village could take on its own when past networks had fallen apart. During the 1980s, when he was first a club director and then party secretary, networks of cultural institutions and social services provided country dwellers with opportunities to spend free time seeing movies or engaging in other pursuits. The present, by contrast, was characterized by isolation and abandonment to the pitiful state of agriculture that he returned to again and again throughout the interview. In his pessimistic assessment, religion was something for the village to fall back on when left to its own devices, not a reason for new translocal hope.

The chairman's remarks show that the seminar required cooperation between urban and rural organizers who differed widely in their understanding of religious revival. While urban activists treated the survival of chimarij practices as dependent on their integration into city-centered, future-oriented didactic networks, this chairman interpreted them as an option for rural people forced to make do with a situation of stasis or regression. Both sides skillfully employ methodologies for mobilizing people along centralized pyramids of transmission, but only the city activists seemed to believe in their potential to make a difference.

Making a didactic public

The remarks of the collective farm chairman highlight some of the ironies of this seminar on the significance of "Mari immaterial culture" for "spiritual security." There seems to

be an incongruity between the dynamic promises of didacticized religion and the very marginality that pushes Mari activists toward adopting this model. Part of what is happening with the chimarij religion involves processes of codification and setting of canons of textual and personal authority that have been described as "rationalization" (Weber 1972 [1921]), "internal conversion" (Geertz 1973b), and "Protestantization" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988) by social scientists working in other parts of the world. By calling similar developments in post-Soviet Marij El "didactization," my aim is to draw attention to the way in which a perceived need for easier and speedier teachability, facilitated by networks of people who transmit teaching methodology, can be an engine for religious change in its own right.

At the seminar, the task of didacticizing fell largely to the two ethnographers, Nikandr Popov and Ol'ga Kalinina, both researchers at the republic's Institute for History, Language and Literature, who gave lectures whose titles reflected concerns elaborated by the Orthodox Church as well as by Soviet-era lecturers. Popov lectured on "The social concept of the Mari traditional religion, as a factor in the strengthening of the spiritual security of the country" and "The foundations of spiritual morality of the Mari people," echoing both the "social concept" passed by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church at its millennium council of 2000, and the widespread Khrushchev- and Brezhnev-era lectures on communist morality. Kalinina's topics were more directly oriented toward practical application of the experiences gained at the seminar. In her lecture "Calendrical folk festivals of the Mari in ethnographic materials," she provided a guide to existing ethnographic literature on Mari festivals, inviting

participants to draw on such literature when organizing events. And on the morning of the ceremony, she gave a short briefing on how to dress and behave in the sacred grove.

The didacticizing efforts of both scholars included efforts to package features of the Mari religion into lists, once again showing the perceived effectiveness of this teaching tool. Kalinina had prepared a handout listing eighteen numbered rules for behavior before, during and after the ceremony. "I have a little *metodichka* for you […] Our Ol'ga Aleksandrovna Kalinina from the Mari Research Institute has put it together" ("Myjyn tygaj *malenkij metodich*kym tylanda […] Tide memnan *MarNII* gychyn Ol'ga Aleksandrovna Kalinina *razrabotala*"), the retired army officer from the Mari Cultural Center said while distributing the handout.[15] Through the Russian term *metodichka*, he assimilated the list of behavioral rules to the instructional aids which methodicians spent their professional lives using and "putting together" (*razrabotat'*, literally "to work out").

Popov acknowledged the lack of just such lists of rules as a problem within the Mari religion. Lecturing on the social concept of the Mari religion, he admitted that the Mari had no such thing as the ten commandments, but that, as God had revealed himself to different people's in different ways, the Maris also possessed "God's sayings" (jumyn oj-vlak) of which different ones had been preserved in different places, but which, if put together "like a mosaic," had "great meaning." In both lectures he elaborated the plan of gathering together Mari moral precepts from folk tales (jomak) and proverbs (kalykmut), in which Maris articulated ideas about good and evil, and precepts on "how to relate to

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[15] Tape of seminar, Morki, July 12, 2005.

God, how to relate to other peoples, how to build up respect for the family, how to enrich our own culture."[16]

Popov's efforts recall those of nineteenth-century folklorists who assembled European folk epics from individual verses and themes,[17] or more generally the attempts to formulate coherent, decontextualized systems out of disparate and situated sources for which anthropologists have long criticized each other.[18] These lectures can certainly be situated in a particular tradition of European folklore studies. But they also show the power of a didactic model of religion. Listable precepts are not only convenient for structural analysis, they are also easy to disseminate, recite, and memorize, and hence teachable even in a short-term seminar, or in the classes on Mari religion whose introduction into the school curriculum Popov also advocated. In efforts to gain recognition as a religion on a par with others, chimarij activists looked to networks of teachers and cultural workers for support, and obviously considered lists and other forms of didactic entextualization necessary for reaching this audience. [19]

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[16] Taped lecture by Nikandr Popov, Joshkar-Ola, July 11, 2005. I thank Svetlana Algaeva for help with translating this passage.

[17] See for instance Honko 1987 on the Finnish Kalevala, and Knight 1998 on the influence of central European folklore studies on the development of ethnography as an academic discipline in Russia.

[18] Some of that disciplinary self-critique was inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's critique of structuralism's tendencies to ignore the contingencies of practice in which people encounter and co-produce what social scientists can abstract as social structures or cultural systems (Bourdieu 2000 [1972]). In other places, it was formulated as emerging from dissatisfaction with the lack of fit between the aspirations and interests of fieldworkers and their interlocutors (e.g. Crapanzano 1980; Zolbrod 1992). Talal Asad's (1992) critique of Clifford Geertz's notion of religion as a cultural system can be read as an application of this debate to anthropological theories of religion.

[19] The desire for didactic entextualization of the Mari religion is not specific to the post-Soviet period, but has made itself known repeatedly in situations where the legal possibility or traditional pathways of transmission of Mari religious practice were threatened. Paul Werth (2001) has applied Geertz's term "internal conversion" to the Kugu sorta, a late-nineteenth-century movement among the Mari striving for religious reform and government recognition, which placed an emphasis on codification and written communication of doctrine that is in some ways comparable to developments a century later. And in 1947, Commissioner Nabatov wrote to his superiors in Moscow: "There were requests from Mari karts to reissue the brochure 'religious rituals of the Cheremis' – an edition of the Kazan missionary society (1887). This brochure quotes prayers, addresses to divinities and the order of religious ceremonies among the Maris."

The Mari are not unique among post-Soviet nationalities in trying to open training centers for religious specialists in the interest of religious revitalization, and in using the infrastructure of Soviet-era cultural institutions to do it. Similar developments are happening within Sakha and Tuvinian shamanism in Siberia (Balzer 2005; Walters 2002), and in the fellow Finno-Ugric republic of Mordovia (Shchipkov 1998). None of the reports on these cases gives a clear idea of how permanent such training efforts actually become, to what degree they aspire to replace more informal modes of training, and how many priests or shamans they train. In the Mari republic, the training center remained a dream at the time I completed my research. But collaboration between the High Priest, the network of state-sponsored cultural institutions, and voluntary organizations such as Mari Ushem was leading to more informal training partnerships. The onaeng-vlak who traveled to Shorun'zha on federal grant money to officiate at sürem under the supervision of the High Priest are one example, the young men whom the club director from Shin'sha sent to train with him in Joshkar-Ola (see chapter 2) are another.

In these settings, the methods of teaching remain those of a traineeship imparting knowledge through "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 1991), but trainees and teacher are brought together through institutionalized networks, not by virtue of kinship or residence in the same village. At the same time, written didactic materials, some of them circulated through the same networks, were being integrated into such unmediated training relationships.

For instance, one onaeng in Shorun'zha, whom I visited in April, displayed on a shelf in his kitchen the book Jumyn jüla, co-authored by the High Priest of the Republic

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Nabatov cited lack of paper as a reason to refuse this request (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 51 – Report by Commissioner Nabatov for the first quarter of 1947, April 21, 1947).

and the ethnographer Popov (Popov and Tanygin 2003), as well as Popov's collection of Mari-language prayers from nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic sources (Popov 1991). When I asked him whether he used these books, he said no, he knew the prayers and actions without them, but when someone came to him and said they did not know what to say in the sacred grove, he recommended reading the prayer book once or twice; after that people could pray by themselves.[20] At a prayer ceremony in the northwest of the republic I met an onaeng who used a "methodical aid" transmitted in his family: photocopies of notebook pages in which his father had written down prayer texts for him. He also referred a list distributed by the High Priest specifying the gods to be worshiped at each tree, and the sacrificial animals they should receive.[21] And a school principal from a district center, whom I saw among the officiants at two transregional ceremonies, told me that he had heard his grandfather say prayers as a child, and remembered the main parts and transitions of the texts from that time. The rest, he said, he could improvise or gather together from books.[22]

These examples show that contemporary priests receive entextualized versions of religious traditions from a variety of sources – through public circulation, directions to them from the High Priest, and through written and oral transmission within their families. They use written and oral texts, familiar and remote sources of authority, public and exclusive materials to supplement each other. This easy coexistence perhaps casts doubt on the efforts of activists to promote religious revival exclusively through

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[20] Taped interview, April 10, 2005. This man had probably not read Jumyn jüla, because although he claimed that everything in it was correct because written down from the words of Tanygin and then printed, he also emphatically said no when I asked if it was true that all the Mari gods were really one, which is the central thesis of this book.
[21] Field notes, October 2, 2005.
[22] Field notes, November 6, 2005.

formalized training networks. But it also suggests how successful the Soviet-era models for such networks were in familiarizing people with habits of self-study and distance learning – such as working with books to supplement gaps in one's knowledge, and compiling personal archives of notes and copied texts.

Providing another example of the combination of personal and mass disseminated transmission in didacticism, the practice of self-taught chimarij priests also points to an important difference between such a didactic network and the model of the liberal public as it has been theorized by Jürgen Habermas and Michael Warner. The liberal public is ideally constituted with reference to texts and artifacts that are accessible to anyone who cares to pay attention (Habermas 1962: 55-57; Warner 2002: 87). Only some of the texts circulating through Soviet training networks are public in this sense, others have more restricted addressees: Methodical letters of instruction were only addressed to lecturers in the Knowledge Society or the Communist Party, training events were only open by invitation, and even printed lectures were often distributed to members of the organization only, not appearing for sale to the general public. Chimarij didactic materials are further differentiated between those publicly accessible (e.g. Popov's printed collection of prayers), those available to cultural workers and teachers (lectures at the seminar, scenarios for events distributed through the Mari Cultural Center), and those available to priests (the typed calendar of festival dates distributed by the High Priest). In a form that is probably not unheard of in liberal society either, a combination of publicly available materials and those with restricted circulation provides training networks with central direction and the ability to reach out to those who are still untouched by the message.

If chimarij activists seem to find the structures of Soviet didactic networks useful for their own religious revival, they show the multiple purposes such directed networks can have. Contrary to the idea that any outside direction of a public has to look like the bureaucratic imposition of a totalitarian state (Warner 2002: 69), the driving force behind the search for centralized control does not necessarily have to be a state government. In the chimarij case, references to "state integrity and spiritual security" in the title of the training seminar discussed in this chapter do seem to suggest the interest of government in controlling religious movements. Marij El has indeed an image as one of the Volga republics most loyal to Moscow: in 2000 and 2004, the republic elected and re-elected an openly Kremlin-backed candidate for president, who contrasts sharply to the stances of the leaders of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. The staff of the Mari Cultural Center and the High Priest were careful never to criticize the republic's government, in contrast to those chimarij activists who were more outspoken nationalists. But efforts to didacticize did not only come from the loyalists, but also from their critics in the political party/cultural association Mari Ushem, who for a number of years sponsored lectures on Mari paganism in Joshkar-Ola and produced video tapes of the lecture series in 2004. What is more, there was not always a sharp distinction between the two didacticizing projects, since both organizations collaborated at some ceremonies and some cultural workers who received materials from the Mari Cultural Center were also members of Mari Ushem. It is thus not necessarily state surveillance that drives the urge to construct a centrally directed didactic network, but rather the desire to appropriate forms of power that first came to rural Russia through the modernizing Soviet state.

Different from evangelical churches active in Marij El, chimarij didacticism has no other models and institutional bases to look to than those of Soviet public education. The evangelical churches themselves can hardly serve as models, because most of them remain limited to the city and some district centers, with a very small presence in the countryside. But the attraction of the didactic model for chimarij activists as well as its incongruity with many aspects of rural ritual life raises questions about the direction in which didactic networks take postsecular religion. Many ethnographic studies of contemporary religious movements have had to contend with the central role played by formalized teaching and learning and publicly circulating didactic materials (Crapanzano 2000; Erzen 2006; Harding 2000; Hirschkind 2006; Luhrmann 2004; Mahmood 2005). But they rarely thematize this didactic way of framing religious practice, or analyze what assumptions about religiosity and what forms of authority these didactic modes of organization entail.

By organizing as a didactic network, constituted through a combination of publicly circulating materials and some more restricted forms of person-to-person instruction, religious groups transform social or political marginality into promises of collective and individual change and growth (cf. Dombrowski 2001). Like the constantly changing "political and scientific knowledge" that fueled the scientific world view of Soviet propaganda, the message of religious didactic networks is versatile, responding to the changing needs of different missionary settings and (among Pentecostals at least) to the changing personal "revelations" of religious leaders. Also like Soviet propagandists, religious networks maintain a discourse on methods for reaching new constituencies with

effective knowledge – knowledge that must not merely be accepted and understood, but put into action, quickly and predictably changing people's behavior.

Seminars in chimarij Paganism represent a plea to equal status with other religions developing in this postsecular space, a plea made by way of equivalences – Maris also have a "social concept" and a list of teachable moral precepts. They are also attempts to harness the transformative power of didacticism in a situation where return to a tradition involves all the effort of establishing something radically new, because people and circumstances have changed so much that they need to be transformed again to adequately embody the tradition. At the same time, these seminars are also a way of making do at a time when the resources of the state and of developing private businesses are flowing elsewhere.

The didacticism of Soviet atheism and post-Soviet religion may then be a corollary of perceived rapid change, and of aspirations to bring about and direct such change with limited use of outside resources. Both treat change as primarily a human and cognitive problem, presenting challenges that can be overcome by self-willed acts of understanding, memorizing, and deciding. To predispose people to undertake such acts, didactic interventions seek to engage human perceptions and emotions. In the next three chapters, I will turn to the tools of such emotional influence: visual images and ritual settings. In the process, it will become clear that the ability to wield methodical tools depends on a range of creative skills and philosophical assumptions. As we dig deeper into the ethical and spiritual demands of didacticism, we will also see that differences between Soviet atheist, Russian Orthodox, Evangelical Protestant, and chimarij practices go deeper than can be explained by reference to each group's closeness to state power.

Chapter 5

Visuality and the search for the concrete

Before he died, the dormitory supervisor's husband saw a sign in a dream. Or rather, a poster. During his terminal illness, he had long resisted his wife's attempts to get him to declare his faith in Christ. But, as she later recounted in her testimony in the Lutheran church where she was in charge of the dormitory for visitors, he slowly began to learn prayers, laughing when he forgot the words. Then one day he told her: "I saw a dream: a colorful poster (*krasochnyj plakat*), on which was written 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'" From this she concluded that he had died a believer, and was waiting for her in heaven.[1]

That the sign from god came in the form of a poster with writing on it, that it was colorful, and that the dying man's wife interpreted it as making manifest the culmination of a complex spiritual process, resonates in curious ways with other uses of visual materials that I encountered during my research. In Soviet as well as post-Soviet pedagogy, the proper use and the expected effects of visual materials were one of the prime areas of methodological reflection, and the creation and display of images and graphics was a matter of much effort and prestige for secular as well as religious methodicians.

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[1] Field notes, June 24, 2005.

Although the Soviet Union is certainly not the only place where images are an important part of didactic endeavors, Soviet methodicians had a particularly rich tradition of reflection on the uses and effects of visuality at their disposal. In advice literature for lecturers, a specific set of expectations was attached to the use of what was known as *nagljadnye posobija*, visual teaching aids. Such aids were supposed to make a lecture intellectually accessible, persuasive, and emotionally engaging, thus facilitating the transfer between acquired knowledge and changed actions that propaganda was supposed to achieve. Through the specific semantics of the adjective *nagljadnyj*, which can be translated as "visual," but also as "intuitively persuasive," the call for *nagljadnost'* included more than just a use of pictures. Figurative speech, effective examples, and statistics all counted as "visual" tools through which a lecturer could engage an audience and bring propaganda "closer to life."

In this chapter, I look at the concept of *nagljadnost'* as an umbrella term for a range of ways to make propaganda more "concrete," thus providing an answer to the problem of turning universalistic ideology into livable social imaginaries. Images and other means of visualization were used to make abstract processes comprehensible and present local efforts as contributions to statewide or worldwide endeavors. More specifically, I show that part of the familiarity with "colorful posters" comes not just from *seeing* them, but from the many occasions at which people *made* them. Visual materials were often hand-made and circulated locally, surely requiring their makers to engage with ideological discourse in a different way than when viewing a printed poster. Continuing the line of investigation of the previous two chapters, I argue that late Soviet didacticism was more effective than is often thought. It was able to engage peripheral

communities in its reproduction, requiring them to imaginatively insert themselves into standardized roles for fulfilling unionwide objectives.

Sometimes included under the heading of *nagljadnost'*, social-science statistics were another form of concreteness that partook of this combination of specificity and standardization. In the latter part of this chapter, I discuss the rise of empirical, quantitative social-science research in the late Soviet period as part of the controversial search for ways to help propaganda engage more directly with locally specific realities.

In a post-Soviet world in which hand-painted posters with colorful text are still familiar enough to reach into dream narratives, religious activists can apply their poster-making skills to proclaim the glory of god instead of the glory of the party. In the next chapter, I explore the reverberations of Soviet discourses about the persuasive effects of images in another major visual tradition of the region, that of Orthodox icon veneration. In this chapter, I am concerned with how late Soviet reflections on visuality help us appreciate the quandaries of methodically operationalizing concreteness.

Nagljadnost': Learning by seeing

"Ten thousand words cannot replace one image," a Khrushchev-era brochure on film in atheist propaganda states, quoting a Chinese proverb to argue that the clarity and accessibility of visual media could help viewers give up "the idealist agnosticism characteristic of religion, that is the notion of the fundamental unknowability of the world" (Zil'berberg 1956: 4). In assuming a direct link between seeing and knowing, Soviet atheists may sound like uncritical heirs of what Martin Jay (1993) has called the "ocularcentrism" of the Enlightenment. But the semantic range of the noun *nagljadnost'*

and its derivatives points to ideas about the link between vision and human motivation that are more complex than they at first appear.

Most notably, *nagljadnost'* belongs to the vocabulary of methodical approaches, where it is a recipe for making knowledge effective rather than simply a metaphor for knowing. That propaganda must be *nagljadnaja* is a recurrent statement in advice literature for lecturers of the 1960s and 70s, supported by such standard authorities as recent party resolutions or the works of Lenin. An article on the use of visual aids in party study circles, published at the start of the 1972 academic year in the Russian-language newspaper of Medvedevo district in the Mari ASSR, starts with a quote from Lenin: "The art of every propagandist lies precisely in this, to influence a given audience in the best possible way, making a known truth as convincing for it as possible, as easy to assimilate as possible, as *nagljadnaja* and impressive as possible." The author, the leader of the school of basic economic knowledge in a state farm in the Mari ASSR, goes on to say that "in our propaganda work we must keep to Leninist principles of party propaganda" and that visual media (*sredstva nagljadnosti*) constitute "one of the effective means for the activation of cognitive activity among the participants," especially in a heterogeneous group of students.[2] Visual media are thus understood didactically as a means to persuade and engage an audience.

Advice literature, describing events as examples for other cultural workers to follow, often spells out the intended effects of methodical devices, and is thus a good source both for the range of visual media used in Soviet propaganda and for the underlying ideas about human motivation. The following description of an evening on the topic of "Science and religion" comes from a manual on atheist propaganda in cultural

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[2] *Put' k kommunizmu*, September 7, 1972, p. 2 (V. Vasil'ev, "Nagljadnost' na zanjatijakh").

institutions written by Mikhail Nekhoroshkov, the biologist from the teachers college whom we have met as the organizer of the "Miracles without miracles." In preparation for the evening, conducted in 1966 in the Medvedevo district House of Culture, visual media helped attract the audience and concentrate attention on key themes:

> *In order to attract a wide audience*, the House of Culture, besides *colorfully designed announcement posters* (*krasochno oformlennykh afish*), uses the local radio, invitation cards, notifies the leaders of public organizations, firms and rural institutions by telephone. […] Before the evening began, the listeners acquainted themselves with the *exhibitions of atheist literature*, of *paintings* of Russian and Soviet artists unmasking religion. The *skillfully designed visual material* (*umelo oformlennaja nagljadnost'*) *attracted the attention* of those present, *caused not a few reflections and even disputes*. (Nekhoroshkov 1967a: 8, my italics)

The combined intellectual and emotional effects of visual impressions – attracting attention, causing "reflections and even disputes" – continued during the evening itself, where sights, music, and words all complemented each other. After an initial piece by the choir, singing the "March of the enthusiasts" on a stage illuminated by a single beam of light, the cinematic projector was turned on, "and on the screen appear images from the newsreel on the launching of a space rocket." This was followed by a talk on the topic of "Science and religion" held by a teacher from a local school, an overview of scientific-atheist literature in the holdings of the district library, a demonstration of chemical experiments unmasking religious "miracles," a recital of atheist poetry, a performance of the Russian genre of humorous folk song known as *chastushki* with atheist texts, sung by two female students "dressed in brightly colored Russian costumes," and finally by a short dramatic sketch "about a fortune-teller and a trusting girl" (Nekhoroshkov 1967a: 8-9).

While the stated effect of the sketch was emotional engagement with the victim of religious deceit – all present reportedly "unwittingly sympathized" with the girl (*nevol'no perezhivali*, Nekhoroshkov 1967a: 9), Nekhoroshkov does not explicitly discuss the intended effects of the newsreel images of the space rocket. Given the abundant references to Soviet space exploration in propaganda materials of the 1960s, he seems to take for granted that a technologically produced image of this triumph of Soviet science would predispose people to accept the assertions of the lecture on "Science and religion," i.e. that science and religion were opposed to each other and that science was superior in its ability to improve human life.[3] Assuming that this was the rationale behind the clip from the newsreel, three different purposes of the visual are involved in Nekhoroshkov's account of the evening on "Science and religion:" to attract attention (the announcement posters and the exhibits of books and pictures), to elicit intellectual and emotional responses (the exhibits and the visually striking aspects of the performances), and to reinforce the persuasive effects of verbal arguments. The latter effect is achieved because of an assumed capacity of images to bundle information and emotional appeal in a compactness that words cannot approach, making them available for intuitive apprehension.

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[3] This interpretation was given to Soviet space exploration in *Pravda* articles and in manuals on propagating the successes of space exploration, such as one that was printed by a Moscow publishing house with the quite large print run of 30,000 copies, one of which made it into the Mari republican library (Bazykin and Komarov 1961). The resonance of these topoi in the Mari ASSR is attested by such documents as the reports of two district divisions of the Knowledge Society for 1961, both of which are prefaced by references to Gagarin's flight to the cosmos, which showed "the greatness and superiority of Soviet over capitalist science, opened the way for the most unforeseen victories of humans over nature" (GARME, f. 737, op. 2, d. 87, l. 106, 154 [quote from l. 154] – Reports from the Morki and Medvedevo district divisions of the Knowledge Society on their work, April 1961). The "Miracles without Miracles" as performed by the atheist club of the teachers college also included a song about the triumph of space exploration (Nekhoroshkov 1964: 31).

A closer look at the semantic field of *nagljadnost'* shows that its unifying element is reference to an intuitive form of learning, based on demonstration and observation rather than verbal explanation. While the abstract noun *nagljadnost'* may be a Soviet-era neologism, the adjective *nagljadnyj* and morphologically related terms were part of the pre-revolutionary Russian language, combining meanings of seeing, supervising, and learning. The root *-gljad-* refers to the faculty of sight, as in the noun *vzgljad* (gaze) or the verb *gljadet'* (to look). The common spatial prefix *na-* adds a connotation of "on," "over," or "from above." The 1905 edition of Vladimir Dal's dictionary, the authoritative reference work for the Russian language up to the revolution, contains the verb *nagljadet'/nagljadat'* in the sense of "to look after, to supervise, to observe"[4] and the derivative noun *nagljadok* or *nagljadysh* – a foster child, someone one has taken a responsibility to raise and look after. Closer to the Soviet use of *nagljadnost'* is a related group of words, which refer to a particular style of learning through observation: the nouns *nagljaden'e* or *nagljadka* refer to "the capacity of an autodidact (*sposobnost' samouchki*), a skill obtained by experience, through looking at others (*na drugikh gljadja*)." The adjective *nagljadnyj* is defined as "learned by *nagljadka*; experienced, practical, applied; clear, comprehensible, reasonable." Examples come out of pedagogical practice: "the *nagljadnyj* method of teaching," and "the geometrical method of proof is more *nagljadnyj* than the algebraic." A second adjective, *nagljadchivyj*, describes a person "who has *nagljadchivost'*, i.e. the capacity to learn by *nagljadka*."

In Soviet literature, the adjective *nagljadnyj* is used in much the same way as defined by Dal', combining meanings of "visual," "done through visual demonstration" with those of "persuasive" and "immediately comprehensible" (comprehensible "at a

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[4] Synonyms given are *nadzirat', nasmatrivat', nabljudat', prismatrivat', brat' chto-libo pod svoj nadzor.*

glance," to give an English analogy for the implied link between vision and speedy mental processing). By contrast, *nagljadka* as a designation of an autodidactic way of learning-by-seeing was not a term I encountered in Khrushchev and Brezhnev-era literature. The new term *nagljadnost'* still referred to processes of intuitive learning, but presupposed a teacher who deliberately stimulates and directs these processes. As part of a methodological discourse, the term encompassed both the materials used in order to visually enhance the learning process, and the quality which made such materials effective. In the first sense, *nagljadnost'* might be translated as visual media (though it includes, as we will see, figures of speech, statistics, and other ways assumed to make information more accessible and relevant), in the second as "visuality," "intuitive intelligibility," or "persuasiveness."

The rich semantics of *nagljadnost'* point to the complex pedagogical tradition of which this concern with perception and intuition in the learning process is a part. The semantic range of the Russian term very closely corresponds to German *Anschaulichkeit*, a term from nineteenth-century romantic philosophy that denotes the capacity of objects of contemplation to stimulate a cognitive process that combines sensory perception and intellectual generalization. Where for Immanuel Kant, *Anschauung* (intuition) as sense perception was distinct from the generalizing cognitive activity that is based on intellectual concepts, Johann Wolfgang Goethe developed the argument that *Anschauung* (as sensual contemplation) could generate generalizations of a different kind. In his work on the morphology of plants and the perception of color, Goethe argued that contemplation could provide insights that were neither abstract ideas nor mere additions of empirically observed traits, but rather holistic visions of the essential features of a

species or phenomenon. The *Urpflanze* ("original plant") of his *Metamorphosis of plants* (1790), for instance, was a construct that would comprise the essential features of all existing plants, derived from observation of the infinite variety of plant life, without containing copies of any empirically observable features (Breidbach 2006; Burwick 1986).

Although natural scientists largely rejected Goethe's approach, the influence of his thought on European reading publics was great enough to inspire twentieth-century *Gestalt* psychology and early German and Russian abstract art of the *Bauhaus* and *Brücke* movements (Ash 1995: 85-87; Vitz and Glimcher 1984: 100-103). His questions about the relationship between sensory perception and human ways of learning and meaning-making was also taken up by philosophers like Hegel and Schelling (both read avidly by Russian radicals from the mid-nineteenth century onward, Malia 1965), and attracted the attention of reformist pedagogues in western Europe as well as in Russia (Froese 1963; Möckel 2003). It is thus perhaps no coincidence that the semantics of a term from German idealist philosophy should survive in Soviet-era Russian as a part of pedagogical vocabulary.

Nineteenth-century Russian movements for pedagogical reform developed in dialogue with central European pedagogical currents such as the *Kindergarten* movement, Johann Pestalozzi's "object learning," the eurhythmic exercises of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophists, all of which involved ideas about integrating sensory experience into educational processes (Kirschenbaum 2001: 10-19; Maydell 1997). Even a Slavophil skeptic such as Lev Tolstoj was aware of western European reformist institutions, which he visited on a study tour in 1860-61 (Froese 1963: 100-101).

Although the relationship between reformist pedagogues trained before the revolution and the Bolshevik government of the 1920s and 1930s was fraught with conflict, some of them were able to apply such multisensory forms as the cultural excursion or the didactic spectacle in the service of socialism (Clark 1995; Fitzpatrick 1970; Johnson 2006: 97-123; Plaggenborg 1996: 217). Post-war literature on *nagljadnost'* shares a similar interest in the interaction of various senses in stimulating interest and understanding, be it in theoretical studies on the combination of visual materials and speech in teaching (Zankov 1958) or in advice literature on the use of visual materials in propaganda (Zil'berberg 1956; Gorfunkel' 1976).

This is merely a possible intellectual history, and it is doubtful how much of it would have been known to Soviet specialists on *nagljadnost'*. But is safe to say that the literature they produced deals with complex philosophical questions about the link between perception and knowledge. It does so by transposing these questions into a methodological key, providing instructors with tools for engaging and convincing an audience through visualization. In addition to still and moving images, such "visual aids" include illustrative examples, numbers, and performances that appeal to senses other than sight. In the words of P. L. Gorfunkel', whose manual on "Psychological foundations of *nagljadnost'* in propaganda lectures" was part of the advice literature available to lecturers in the Mari republican library, *nagljadnyj* material is not only "what people look at," but "everything that enables the emergence of a visual image (*vozniknoveniju zritel'nogo obraza*):"

> If a person, looking at a chart, feels only the visual image of the numbers placed in it, but not of the phenomenon which is reflected through these numbers, then for him the chart is not a visual aid (*ne javljaetsja nagljadnym posobiem*). On the

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other hand, if we play to the audience a recording of a speech by V. I. Lenin, then such a demonstration, addressed not to sight, but to hearing, has all the qualities of *nagljadnost'*. The listener is affected not only by the power of Lenin's speech, with its characteristic simplicity, accessibility (*dokhodchivost'*), iron logic, passionate conviction. In him arises also the visual image of the leader, stored in memory from portraits, photographs, films, which enhances the propaganda effect manifold. (Gorfunkel' 1976: 15)

The author here is arguing that tables and statistical charts as well as sound recordings can serve as "visual aids" if and when they enable the audience to visualize something more than what they immediately perceive – the course of development represented by numbers, the visual appearance of Lenin in addition to the qualities of his voice. Another manual praises Lenin himself for having mastered these principles: the statistical charts in his book "The Development of Capitalism in Russia" are said to "allow the readers to see the processes, the tendencies of development standing behind the numbers" (Kirsanov 1976: 41). The same manual speaks about descriptive and figurative speech as "interior *nagljadnost'*," and formulates the goal of the lecturer as speaking in such a way about remote events "as if everything said was also seen, experienced (*perezhito*)" (Kirsanov 1976: 55).[5]

The preoccupation with helping audiences see remote events and long-term processes points to an additional difference between the pre-revolutionary *nagljadka* and the Soviet *nagljadnost'*. The latter is not only deliberately directed by a methodologically

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[5] The division between "interior" and "exterior" *nagljadnost'* recalls the multi-faceted meanings of "image" as applied to commodities in the advertising industry, where it can refer both to visual depictions and to the associations that come to people's minds in connection with a brand name or with the visual, aural, or verbal aspects of an ad. As William Mazzarella (2003) has pointed out, professionals in the advertising industry engage with complex questions about the capacity of images to mediate between sensual impressions and emotions, concrete impressions and generalizations, quite similar to those faced by the Soviet methodicians I discuss here. While pedagogical thought is absent from his genealogy of debates about the visual in nineteenth-century European philosophy, he traces a dynamic, though sometimes antagonistic, relationship between state-sponsored didactic initiatives and commercial advertising in India, suggesting that the relationship between didactic and commercial uses of the visual needs to be investigated more carefully, in India and also in Russia (on post-Soviet advertising, see Condee and Padunov 1995).

conscious instructor, it is also concerned with helping learners see phenomena that are not readily accessible to the human eye, quite like Goethe's *Urpflanze* or the psychological *Gestalt*. Whereas learning by *nagljadka* assumes a situation where a pupil can see and imitate what a master does, some of the phenomena dealt with in socialist propaganda did not have an observable shape at all, either because they dealt with abstract processes or with future attainments. Summing up the effect of various forms of visualization, Gorfunkel' states that "*nagljadnost'* in a lecture ensures the 'visibility' (*zrimost'*) of the phenomenon discussed, i.e. ensures the greatest measure of concreteness" (Gorfunkel' 1976: 15). Different from the situation of learning a skill by observation, the visibility of the subject matter of the lecture cannot be taken as a given.

The Soviet lecturer had to be told how to produce visibility and concreteness precisely because many of the phenomena discussed in socialist propaganda were neither easily visualized nor immediately relevant to their audiences. Charged with presenting phenomena such as the developmental trends of the Soviet economy or the contribution of atheism to social progress, rural propagandists constantly faced the problem of how to visualize the invisible. The visual aids they produced bear some of the traces of this dilemma, but their production and circulation also offered concrete and visible occasions for people to participate in the public life of ideological discourse.

Perceptible contributions: hand-made visual aids

The role of visual media in Soviet political culture has been noted by visitors to the Soviet Union as well as by historians. The latter have often focused on printed posters, film, and other mechanically reproduced media in their analyses, in part for

understandable reasons of the preservation and accessibility of materials (Babitsky and

Rimberg 1955; Bonnell 1997; Brooks 2000; R. Cox 2003). Another reason may be the

assumption that modern political propaganda must necessarily rely on technologies of

mechanical reproduction to attain mass effectiveness and ensure state control. The

Bolsheviks themselves seem to have thought so, and worked hard to gain control over the

country's printing presses and distribution networks in the 1920s (Kenez 1984;

Plaggenborg 1996: 109-114). But many historical photographs show that much of Soviet

visual culture was in fact not printed, but hand-painted and calligraphed (fig. 5.1), and, as

we will see below, printed manuals warned methodicians not to expect all necessary

visual aids to be produced for them by state printing presses.
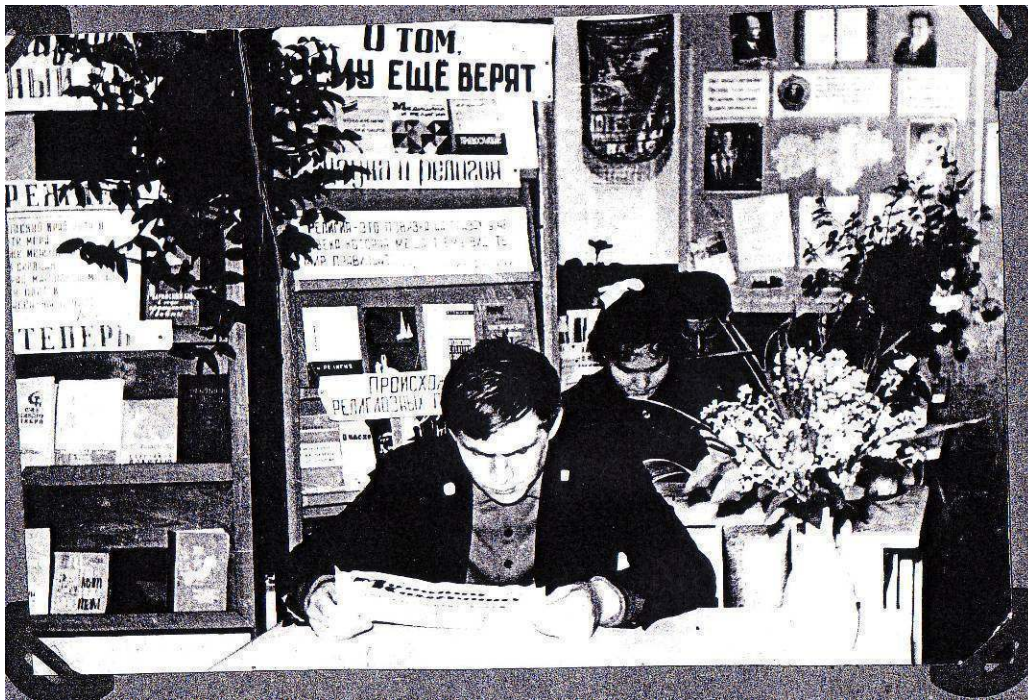
Figure 5.1: Staryj Tor"jal rural library, ca. 1972. Book displays in this reading room are framed by hand-written captions, quotes, and collages. The display behind the young man reading the newspaper is entitled "What people still believe" and features literature on religion and atheism. In the collage to the right, pictures of historical figures and pages of text surround a map of the Mari ASSR. Album "Relay of cultural institutions for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the USSR," Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

Though produced at a scale too small for state censorship, hand-made visual aids did not constitute an oppositional sphere. Rather, in their complementary relationship to print culture, they drew peripheral participants into imaginative engagement with ideology, following the same logic of didactic networks formed through personal ties which I discussed in the previous chapters. Making visual aids enlisted methodicians, schoolchildren, and other local artists in the task of visualizing the connections between local affairs and union-wide plans and policies, and their creations give us a sense of how they understood the demands of specificity and standardization.

Walter Benjamin, the theorist of mechanical reproduction and modernity, also left one of the most perceptive descriptions of the role of the hand-made in the visual culture of 1920s Moscow. Visiting in 1926/27, Benjamin noted printed images of Lenin in various canonized forms and found that the map was "close to becoming the center of the new Russian icon cult" (Benjamin 1955 [1927]: 53). But political posters in the strict sense were rare, and commercial advertising was "uncouth" (*unbeholfen*, 56).[6] What seems to have caught the visitor's eye more were the hand-painted pictures and warning signs, and wall newspapers in schools and factories. Describing such a factory wall newspaper, Benjamin notes a common emotional tinge that connects color, pictures, and textual content:

> Common throughout is only the naïve joyfulness: colorful pictures, and prose or
> verse in between. The paper is the chronicle of the collective. It gives statistical

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[6] Stefan Plaggenborg agrees with Benjamin's perception of the decline of Soviet political posters by the second half of the 1920s, and puts it down to the lack of an image of an enemy after the end of the civil war (1996: 184-185). For both observers, "decline" means both a diminishing political significance of visual culture and a turn away from the avant-garde modernist experimentations with graphic design that characterized early Soviet posters. On Soviet advertising from the end of the NEP era onward, see R. Cox 2003.

data, but also humorous criticism of comrades, mixes this with suggestions for improvement of the enterprise and calls for joint aid projects. (58)

In paying close attention to the visual elements of such media as wall newspapers or library warning signs, Benjamin may simply be compensating for his poor knowledge of the Russian language, which he acknowledges in his Moscow diary (Benjamin 1980: 64). But he also draws attention to the ad-hoc and amateurish character of much of Soviet visual production (fig. 5.2). Although he calls the results "naïve" – perhaps not quite the political culture he expected of a revolutionary workers' state – he seems to take the content and design of the wall newspaper as an expression of the concerns of the collective of which it is a "chronicle." His view of wall newspapers thus contrasts to a recent study, which focuses on text and places the increasing emphasis on images and design much later, in the 1930s and 1950s, interpreting it as a Stalinist domestication of
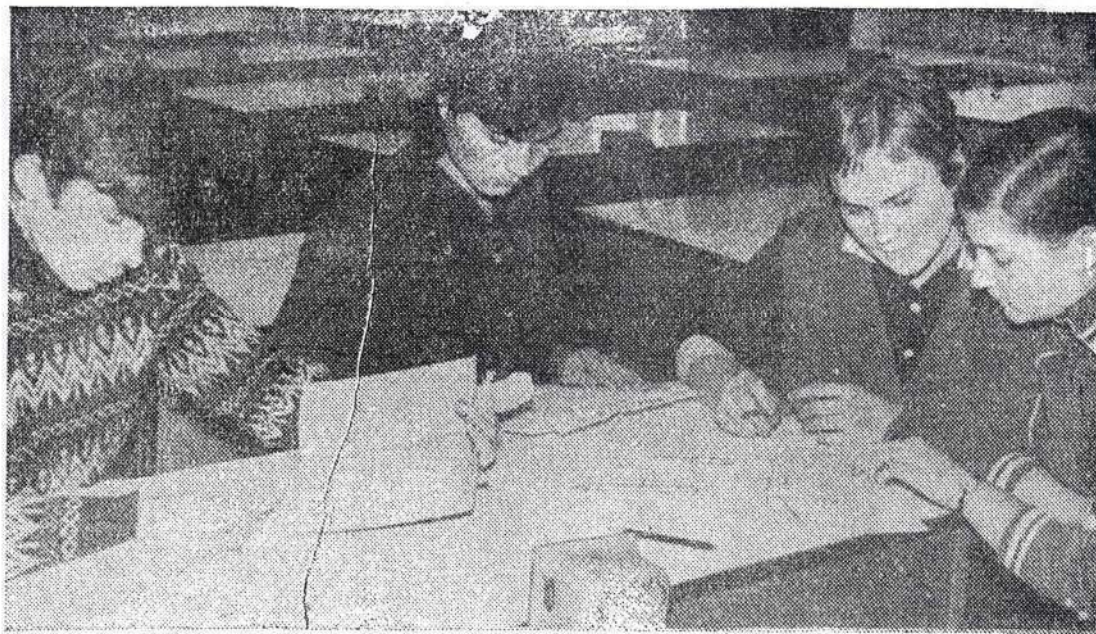
Figure 5.2: Tenth-grade students from Kuznetsovo Middle School creating a wall newspaper for their school's circle of young atheists. *Put' k kommunizmu*, November 23, 1972, p. 3.

the original emancipatory idea of letting workers report on their own working life (Kelly 2002: 589-590).

For interpreting hand-made visual aids of later periods, it seems fruitful to combine attention to the colorful exuberance noted by Benjamin with Kelly's insight that the wall newspaper was a tool for the education of proletarian journalists rather than primarily a means of formulating concerns internal to the work collective. Teaching people to choose colors and shapes may have different effects than teaching them to write journalistic pieces, but it may be premature to assume that only the latter is politically significant.

Part of the significance of disseminating graphic skills lay in the way they helped to extend the circulation of ideological messages in ways that print alone could not. As I showed in the previous chapters, Soviet institutions such as the Knowledge Society or the communist party's departments of propaganda and agitation produced texts and images which were intended to be shared across the Soviet Union, but relied to a great degree on personal and manual, rather than mechanical, reproduction in order to reach provincial peripheries. The same was true for images and other visual materials, with perhaps added expectations attached to their effect on makers and audiences.

Historical accounts and memories show that lecturers learned to make hand-made visual aids in response to deficits in printed materials, but also in order to give centrally disseminated plans local specificity. This newspaper account by the leader of a school of economic knowledge organized by the party organization of a state farm in the Mari ASSR shows how locally made materials supplemented pre-given curricula:

As a propagandist, I personally have mostly used self-made aids such as schemata, diagrams, and charts. What caused this? First, at the beginning of the academic year no printed aids on the materials of the twenty-fourth congress of the CPSU were available. Second, each topic of the program allowed the use of local materials, for example, "The perspective plan for social development of the Azanovskij state farm for the years 1971-1975," and aids were needed as illustrative material. Third, one's own is always closer and more accessible to listeners, because you compile it with the audience in mind. That is why I prepared charts for each topic. I prepared charts on the goals (*o rubezhakh*) of the five-year-plan for the republic, the district, the state farm and others. At the end of the year and during the concluding class we also used printed aids, for instance [the brochure?] 'We will fulfill the ninth five-year-plan!'."[7]

This propagandist gives two reasons for his use of self-made visual aids. First, printed aids are not always produced and distributed on time. It is probably no coincidence that he mentions using printed materials at the end of the academic year, while the necessary publications were still missing at the beginning. Second, printed aids cannot be relied upon to reflect the specific circumstances of the district and enterprise where a lesson is held, but such specificity is desirable for making a lesson interesting and accessible. It is important to note that specificity, in this pedagogical scheme, is not understood to mean local uniqueness or idiosyncrasy, and certainly not an individualized curriculum for a specific state farm. By showing the steps taken in the republic, district, and state farm toward fulfilling the current five-year-plan, the propagandist knew that he was keeping his work in step with rhythms set by events in Moscow, such as the twenty-fourth party congress. Without manual production of materials, the centrally determined curriculum could not have reached the state farm workers in its intended form.

Reminiscent of the lists of titles as prompts for the replication of lectures, there were printed manuals to instruct teachers in outfitting their classrooms and lecturers in

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[7] V. Vasil'ev, "Nagljadnost' na zanjatijakh" (Visuality in the classroom). *Put' k kommunizmu*, September 7, 1972, p. 2.

making slides (Kemerovskij IUU 1975; Abramova 1977). Even film distribution relied to some degree on the manual skills of village projectionists, who painted posters by hand. Two sisters with whom I visited their native village on a day of commemoration of the dead remembered their deceased brother as a good film projectionist because he made a new poster every week to advertise film showings.[8]

In addition to making up for material shortages, the emphasis on painting and calligraphy recruited people into propaganda work who may otherwise not have been involved in it. Since those responsible for saturating an enterprise or institution with visual materials did not always have the skills or time to make them themselves, people with graphic skills found themselves drafted into their service. A graduate of Joshkar-Ola's art school currently teaching woodworking at a residential school and producing carvings for Orthodox churches told me that during his time as a factory worker in the early 1980s he got out of doing industrial paint jobs by painting banners, wall newspapers and display stands for the factory.[9] A young village resident born in 1970 recalled that during his service in the army he was singled out to make posters for the parade grounds because his handwriting was better than that of the scribe of the Komsomol organization. His commanding officer gave him drinks of expensive cognac in recognition for his services.[10]

In order to get a sense of why visual materials were important for connecting universal messages to concrete local circumstances, it is important to see some of the materials these recruits to propaganda work produced. Unfortunately, few of the announcement posters and visual aids survive today, except on black-and-white

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[8] Field notes, June 18, 2005.
[9] Field notes, June 30, 2003.
[10] Field notes, July 14, 2005.

photographs, which do not transmit the colorful ebullience that caught Benjamin's eye. Some materials were recycled, such as a poster or display board featuring the words "THE FIRST ARTIFICIAL SATELLITE OF THE EARTH" and a Lenin quote, whose reverse side ended up as a page in a photo album in a district museum.[11] Others were discarded when political and economic changes made further lecture work obsolete. When I asked about atheist materials at the Knowledge Society's planetarium, the one remaining lecturer on staff said that they were probably thrown out when the republican government evicted the Society from the better part of their building in the center of Joshkar-Ola.

Remaining examples of hand-made visual materials are commemorative albums held in the collections of district museums and of the republican archives. The albums document the contributions of local Komsomol organizations, cultural institutions, rural soviets or district administrations to meeting the goals of a five-year plan or honoring a particular anniversary in the Soviet calendar. For example, albums housed in the Novyj Tor"jal district museum have titles such as "Relay of shock Komsomol deeds, 1980-1981" (*Estafeta udarnykh komsomol'skikh del*), "The cultural institutions of Novyj Tor"jal district in the realization of the provisionment program of the USSR for 1984," or "Relay of work feats" (*Estafeta trudovykh podvigov*, dedicated to the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1977).

Though not primarily used as teaching aids, albums facilitated the circulation and replication of didactic messages about the aims and successes of Soviet policy.[12] In the

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[11] Novyj Tor"jal district museum, album "Estafeta kul'turnykh uchrezhdenij k 50letiju SSSR," ca. 1972.
[12] Occasionally, albums were also used as teaching aids about the Mari countryside. In 1953, the higher party courses in Joshkar-Ola reported on having equipped a classroom of agricultural sciences with hand-made models and posters, stuffed farm animals, and albums from three agricultural enterprises of the

format of the relay race (*estafeta*), each local organization was expected to report on its contribution to fulfilling an economic plan or honoring an anniversary on the album pages allocated to it. A copy of the instruction letter from the district Komsomol committee is glued into the inside front cover of a 1982 album entitled "To the 19th congress of the VLKSM – a worthy greeting."[13] The purpose of the relay race is to "stimulate the growth and creative activity of youth in the struggle for a worthy greeting to the 19th congress of the VLKSM." The album is the medium through which the local organizations will "report on the results of the relay" to the district committee, and they are encouraged to do so in the form of a mix of collage and original drawings:

> The album of the relay can include materials on the most remarkable successes and achievements of the young progressive leaders of the competition, the best Komsomol collectives and classes. In designing the album, photographs, drawings, materials from newspapers can be used (design 3-4 pages).[14]

The instruction contains a chart outlining the route which the album is to travel, including the dates at which the album will be in each of the district's village schools. This particular album was to visit eight schools between February 1 and April 10, 1982, spending between seven and nine days at each location, before finally reaching the district center. On the date indicated on the chart, the instructions specify, the local

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republic, showing "how the progressive forces of agriculture master Michurinist agrobiological science" (GARME, f. P-22, op. 1, d. 33, l. 79 – Report on the work of the nine-month courses for the preparation of party and soviet workers at the Mari regional committee of the CPSU for the academic year 1952-1953). The albums may either have been donated by the enterprises whose achievements were featured, or assembled by students or instructors based on visits to the enterprises and materials provided by them. Advice literature for cultural workers encouraged the creation of albums of newspaper articles and photographs as self-made reference works (Novgorodskoe oblastnoe pravlenie kul'tury 1961: 36-37).

[13] VLKSM is the acronym for the official name of the Komsomol, *Vsesojuznyj leninskij kommunisticheskij sojuz molodezhi* (All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League).

[14] Album "Estafeta udarnykh komsomol'skikh del: XIX s"ezdu VLKSM – dostojnuju vstrechu," 1982. Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

Komsomol cell must "pass on the album along the route indicated, preferably in a festive setting (*v torzhestvennoj obstanovke*)."

According to the director of the Sovetskij district museum, which housed a number of comparable albums, the "festive setting" meant taking the album to the next village "with a concert." This means that the process of circulating albums was a modified version of village-to-village visiting rituals as they were familiar in the region from weddings and village feasts. The village that had completed its album pages would send a delegation including a school dance group or the club's choir to the next village, which would receive the album on stage in the club house amid musical performances and feasting. The same skills of singing, dancing, and feeding guests that were important at other ritual occasions where villages encountered each other as social units. During a wedding, women from the groom's village moved through the streets of the bride's village singing, entering the houses of her relatives, where they were hosted for their song and dance. After the groom took the bride to his home, her relatives made a similar singing tour through his village.[15] On the second day of the midsummer ceremony in Shorun'zha described in the previous chapter, the guests similarly moved down a village street in a procession and were hosted by the adjacent households, but this time the musical accompaniment was furnished by the hosts.

Carried out in familiar ritual form, but through the organizational efforts of party and Komsomol cells in schools, enterprises, and local administrations, the process of compiling and circulating an album allows villages to represent themselves as important social actors, but integrates them as cells into the Soviet administrative pyramid. The

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[15] I participated in such festivities involving the villages of Shin'sha and Shorunzha in January 2006. For a description of Mari wedding traditions providing a synthesis of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century ethnographies, see Smirnov and Popov 2005.

pages designed in one village would be seen in the remaining villages along the album's route to a common administrative center, making them and the quality of the music and feasting part of the "visible economy" in which a village could accrue prestige among neighbors and superiors (Verdery 2003: 178-181). For the bureaucrats at the district or republican level, in turn, the albums constituted sources of information that could be used in reports on the development of their administrative area for agencies higher up.

The circulation of an album thus involves a two-way movement between the generality of union-wide planning and the concreteness of local achievements and conventions. Being dedicated to a task of union-wide significance (fulfilling a five-year plan, greeting an anniversary date) and commissioned by a central agency, the album pages are designed by known groups and individuals, and carry the names and images of locally significant people and events. By asking people to frame local feats and competitions among neighbors as "contributions" toward a centrally-determined goal, album relays make use of localized social loyalties and conventions of ritual exchange in order to carry official ideological messages.

As a form of art with didactic and reporting functions, the relay albums thus attest to the considerable flexibility which enabled Soviet didacticism to retain more local relevance than is often assumed. It is certainly easy to find evidence of the artificiality of Soviet political and economic projects and their remoteness from local concerns.[16] But

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[16] For studies that emphasize the remoteness of Soviet projects of nation-building and social transformation from local realities, see Slezkine 1994, Northrop 2004. Perhaps due to the later temporal focus, perhaps to different methodological assumptions, Caroline Humphrey's study of a Buryat collective farm in the Brezhnev era emphasizes the problems of transforming Marxist ideology into practicable rules for running and inhabiting a collective farm, but also the earnest attempts of local actors to follow central guidelines to the extent practicable and the very real consequences which "Soviet ways of doing things" have on local life (Humphrey 1998, see also Grant 1995). Francine Hirsch (2005) applies to Soviet history Benedict Anderson's classic insight that nations as "imagined communities" rely on such popularly accessible

the visual materials of socialist competition remind us that any national or ideological project needs to offer locally livable processes of mediation, which in turn can give the project an unavoidable local presence that forces people to seriously engage with it rather than treating it as absurd.

A look at the formal features of some album pages helps illustrate how they could help extend the reach of centrally-directed projects at the same time as making them locally meaningful. The collage is a basic technique of these albums. Pages often incorporate photographs and cut-out materials from printed brochures and newspapers with letters and images drawn in felt-tip pen or watercolor. Figure 5.3 is a particularly complete example of this mix of techniques: on the left, the image of a female collective farm worker holding up triangular packages of milk under the slogan "In winter and summer more milk!" is cut out from a poster or brochure and glued to the page. On the right page, cut-out decorative borders frame the photograph of a young woman, identified in the accompanying text as a local instance of the type of dedicated milk maid who is celebrated in the printed poster. The text, calligraphed in felt-tip pen, reads: "Since graduating from school the young communist Galina Ivanovna Panduganova works at the Lopovo dairy farm. In the course of the year 1980 she milked 2129 kg per head. For 1981 she took on the obligation of milking 2700 kg from each cow." Both pages are framed by hand-drawn colored lines, a relatively simple version of a recurrent feature of these album pages – the frame that unifies each set of pages from a given institution and distinguishes it from the other sets (see figs. 5.6-7).

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mediations as census reports, maps, and museums, and that therefore the constructedness of nations does not necessarily mean that they are detached from everyday life (Anderson 1983).

Figure 5.3: "In winter and summer more milk!" Page contributed by the Komsomol cell of the "Memory of Lenin" Collective Farm to the album "Relay of shock Komsomol deeds," 1980-1981, Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

The use of collage to juxtapose printed and centrally disseminated slogans with local responses recurs in other parts of the same album. The Komsomol cells of the collective farm "First of May" and the Nemdinskij state farm both use cut-out representations of banners with Lenin quotes and Lenin's image on their pages, obviously taking them from material that was distributed from Komsomol headquarters in Moscow. Both organizations combine the printed heading "Our Komsomol organization is proud of them" with a Lenin banner (figs. 5.4-5). The text and banner are cut out separately in

Figure 5.4: "Our Komsomol organization is proud of them." Page contributed by the Komsomol cell of the "First of May" Collective Farm to the album "Relay of shock Komsomol deeds," 1980-1981, Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

Figure 5.5: "Our Komsomol organization is proud of them," version two. Page contributed by the Komsomol cell of "First of May" Collective Farm to the album "Relay of shock Komsomol deeds," 1980-1981, Novyj Tor"jal district museum. The white text on the red banner is a Lenin quote, reading: "The task of the youth league is to orient its practical activity such that in studying, organizing, consolidating, struggling, this youth would train itself and all those who see it as leader, so that it would train communists."

each case, and the Lenin banners used are of different sizes, suggesting that the idea to combine quote and banner in a collage was not taken from the printed source, but that the second artist may have taken a clue from the first one when the album circulated. In art history, the collage is often considered a feature of early Soviet avant-garde art that was later suppressed by the dominance of socialist realism (Kiaer 2008). If, though banished from high art, the collage remained a widespread technique in albums and displays, it is perhaps because of its ability to index both the maker's participation in a print public and the efforts of a local community to contribute to the larger public's goals. In figures 5.3 and 5.4, photographs give local faces to printed slogans and show local contributions to the goals defined by these slogans.

As a further visual link between the local context in which the albums were made and the statewide initiatives they commemorated, the hand-written texts of these album

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pages often imitate features of print text. For instance, the milk maid's name and the numbers of kilograms of milk produced by her are written in a different color from the rest of the text in figure 5.3, as if to suggest a pre-printed form that is being filled in. Reminiscent of the methodical instructions that asked lecturers to fill in specific local information into the gaps of a given lecture text (see chapter 2), this technique of presenting locally relevant numbers as if they were filled into the blanks of a questionnaire recurs on many of the album pages. As a device, it seems to suggest the comparability of local activities with those reported on other album pages or in albums from elsewhere. Figure 5.6, for instance, is from an album showing the contributions of individual rural soviets to honoring the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution. Though the hand-written page indexes the care and effort that went into its making, the layout and organization of content imitates a printed page. The text written in black under the blue heading "Composition of the rural soviet" could have come from a government form soliciting information on the soviet, in which case the date and numbers written in red (represented by bold letters in the translation below) would represent the data to be filled in by hand:

> In the elections to local councils of toilers' deputies of the sixteenth legislative session on **June 19, 1977** the composition of the rural soviet was formed, to which were elected **25** deputies, among them Maris – **19**, Russians – **6**, women – **13**, collective farm workers – **15**, members of the intelligentsia – **10**, with higher education – **7**, with middle school education – **11**.

Under this paragraph follows a list of the members of the rural soviet's executive committee, and a diagram showing the permanent committees of the soviet, each represented by a square box with the committee's name and number of members.

На выборах в местные Советы депутатов трудящихся шестнадцатого созыва 19 июня 1977 года образован состав сельского Совета, в который избрано 25 депутатов, из них мари - 19, русских - 6, женщин - 13, колхозников - 15, интеллигенции - 10, с высшим образованием - 7, со средним - 11.

Состав исполкома сельского Совета:

Кошкин Евгений Иванович - председатель.
Сидоркин Иван Дмитриевич - зам председателя.
Смирнова Зоя Григорьевна - секретарь.
Самарцев Валерий Анатольевич - член исполкома.
Лапкасова Ольга Ильинична - член исполкома.

Постоянные комиссии сельского Совета:

| Мандатная. 3 чел. | Планово-Бюджетная 3 чел. | По сельскому хоз-ву, охране природы, дорожному стр-ву, благоустройству 5 чел. | По народному образованию, культуре и здравоохранению 4 чел. | По соц.законности и охране общественного порядка 5 чел. |

Figure 5.6: "Composition of the rural soviet." Page contributed by the Bol'shoj Lumar' rural soviet to the album "Relay of work feats," 1977, Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

In an effect similar to that of the collage elements from printed brochures on figures 5.3-5, the print-like layout of this page suggest that it is an extension of the discourse circulating in print, rather than competition for it. As "graphic artifacts" ("written genres as artifactualized in particular material form," Hull 2003: 291), these pages not only provide the kind of information often solicited by state agencies, but also reference the forms of other graphic artifacts employed by such agencies to collect this information, such as forms with fillable blanks, lists and charts. The album page thus allows viewers to "see" the administration of Bol'shoj Lumar' as participating in such aims as ensuring the political participation of minority nationalities, women and workers, just as the "Memory of Lenin" collective farm is participating in the union-wide drive to produce more milk.

The next page, designed by the same rural soviet (fig. 5.7), combines the personalizing effect of photographs with the textual style of official reports to further document how local actions contribute to wider goals. Under the heading "Culture and consumer services," deputies Galina Ivanovna Koshkina and Zinaida Sergeevna Shabalina are shown "at work" as a librarian and a sales clerk in a grocery store, respectively. The text, again, has the style of an official report and reflects the kind of information rural organizations might be asked to provide to higher administrative bodies:

> On the territory of the rural soviet there are 4 stores, 2 rural clubs, 2 rural libraries, 2 medical clinics. All the above social-service institutions are outfitted with personnel and prepared for work under winter conditions.

Figure 5.7: "Culture and consumer services." Page contributed by the Bol'shoj Lumar' rural soviet to the album "Relay of work feats," 1977, Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

Quite fitting for graphic artifacts that imitate features of official documents, the texts in these albums are all in Russian, indicating the awareness of their creators that the albums would travel into official spheres where there would be non-Mari speakers among their viewers, possibly even beyond the boundaries of the republic.

As a final example of the preference for print-like graphic styles in these meticulously hand-made albums, figure 5.8 presents a striking example to of the effort to reproduce a printed or stenciled look in a one-of-a-kind drawing. The symbols for grain, potato, meat, milk and wool on this page resemble the representations of resources in atlases or the symbols for consumer goods printed on store signs. Fine lines, penciled with a ruler to mark the upper and lower limit of each row of letters are visible on the album page, showing the care and preparation needed to achieve the uniform effect.

Figure 5.8: "Sale and production of agricultural products." Page contributed by the Shujbeljak rural soviet to the album "Relay of work feats," 1977, Novyj Tor"jal district museum.

Again, statistics take a prominent place in the graphic scheme of the page: every box states the number of tons produced and sold by the agricultural enterprises on the territory of the rural soviet, and the overall productivity of the area is represented at the bottom of the page, where the text "Harvested per hectare: grain – 1,780 kg, potatoes – 10,800 kg" forms a kind of black bottom line. Recalling Kirsanov's comment on Lenin's use of statistics, the colorful rendering of these numbers really seem designed to enable villagers and administrators to "see" the phenomenon of a productive rural district.

The use of print-like graphics in these hand-made and hand-circulated objects can be taken to confirm arguments going back to Walter Benjamin, and developed further by Benedict Anderson, that there is a particular connection between modernity, nationalism, and technologies of mechanical reproduction of images and texts (B. Anderson 1983; Benjamin 2003 [1936]). But while Anderson considers print technology as one of the preconditions for translocal communities to establish a meaningful presence in people's lives, these hand-made imitations of print may indicate that where people have access to some print media, graphic artifacts resembling print can extend the print public into aspects of life that it would not otherwise reach. Rather than being marked as unique and hand-made, these one-of-a-kind objects reference the graphic forms and textual conventions of official printed matter, lending local achievements statewide significance.

At the same time, no one would mistake album pages or hand-painted posters for print. The calligraphy and bright color index a careful execution and concern with visual appeal that are not usually characteristic of official documents in modern bureaucracies. As documentary materials, these albums engaged the aesthetic and practical imagination of their makers to a degree that a simply writing a report would not. By relying on the

calligraphic skills of networks of peripheral representatives, the late Soviet state

maintained perhaps a more intimate presence in people's lives than if it had been able to

provide printed materials in sufficient quantity and specificity.

Visual reporting, visual persuasion

The ability of hand-painted visual materials to index care and time spent on making them

made them useful for vertical control. The "relay race" albums, which first circulated

among peers before being collected in a center, were part of a larger use of visual

materials as indices of conscientious, up-to-date work. For example, a file of reports to

the Joshkar-Ola city committee of the Communist Party on the state of "mass-political

work" in primary party organizations from 1960 contains routine references to the state

of "visual agitation" (*nagljadnaja agitatsija*). The party cell of the Ministry of Finance

receives praise for having up to 30-35 "wall correspondents" (*stenkory*) participate in the

wall newspaper, which is renewed monthly.[17] In the candy factory, by contrast, the

neglect of visual agitation reflects the generally bad state of ideological work. An

inspection in April found that the latest issue of the wall newspaper had been created the

previous December, and the only kind of posters to be seen were the socialist obligations

for 1960, hanging in the factory office, the office of an outlying production unit and the

club. "There are no other slogans and posters whatsoever. The obligations of the

production units, which have been adopted in late March, are still not up on the walls." In

general, the party cell takes no initiative in organizing agitational work among the

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[17] GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, 507, l. 1-2 (Information on the ideological work carried out by the party
organization of the Ministry of Finance, April 8, 1960).

factory's collective, and "many agitators do not even know that they have been designated agitators."[18]

Similar attention to visual agitation as a sign of the general state of ideological work and the attitude of local activists and administrators recurs in reports from different institutions and in different years.[19] The former official of the Sovetskij district committee whose memories of being sent to prevent village sacrificial ceremonies in the early 1980s I discuss in chapter 1 said that during inspections collective farms she checked "the state of visual agitation, the red corners, how the milk maids were spending their leisure time." When I asked her why visual agitation was so important, she drew on the studies in psychology that she had started since losing her party job, saying "of course they were influencing people (*vnushali ljudjam*), I understand that now as a psychologist." Perhaps people did not necessarily read the slogans, but "they gave a cheerful look to the village" because they were always painted on red banners. In content also they were optimistic, giving people an optimistic outlook on life, something that had been lacking since perestrojka.[20]

In this interpretation by a former low-level bureaucrat, the "naïve joyfulness" noted by Benjamin in Soviet public art had a functional role to play in motivating people to do what the state expected of them, but was also a feature of a life that was more

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[18] GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, 507, l. 7-8 – Information on the work of the agitcollective and the state of visual agitation in the candy factory of Joshkar-Ola, April 5, 1960. See also GARME, f. P-8, op. 7, 507, l. 12-14 (Information on the state of agitational-mass work in the enterprises and the administration of the Mari Consumers' League for 1960), where a mixed evaluation of the state of visual agitation is in accordance with the overall judgment that the administration and party cell of the enterprise had serious problems in political work, but were struggling to overcome them.

[19] For instance, in 1970 the Mari division of the Knowledge Society held a competition for the best "methodical corner" of a district or local organization of the society, specifying the literature, posters and displays that should be contained in such a corner (GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 307, l. 14-16). A certificate of inspection of the Morki district organization of the Knowledge Society from 1970 or 1971(GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 307, l. 27-27ob) contains special praise for the displays designed by this district organization.

[20] Field notes, August 29, 2005.

interesting and caring, and more inclusive of rural residents, than the post-Soviet era. Although, as we have seen in the first chapter, this woman claimed to have been critical of the anti-religious work she had to do, and to have subverted it by merely advising people to change the date of a ceremony to avoid police repression, she generally expressed a very positive evaluation of her time as a party official in the district committee. This was the "best time of her life," she said, she was surrounded by "decent, educated people" and had the possibility to "communicate with the people" (*obshchat'sja s narodom*). As quoted above, she linked her task of checking on the "state of visual agitation" to checking the outfitting of the red corners, which were intended to be not merely places of political education, but also places of rest for collective farm workers.[21] She generally framed her work as one of "taking care of" rural residents, reporting back to the center when a collective farm didn't have enough coal for the winter or trying to reform drunks by haranguing them into further study. "Then they [the party/the state/officials] cared, asked, summoned people, inquired – and now no one cares," was how she juxtaposed former and current relations between official agencies and rural residents.

In this woman's memories of the contexts in which visual agitation mattered, the two-way work done by visual materials becomes apparent again. Slogans disseminated

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[21] The association of red corners with rest and entertainment along with transmission of pedagogical messages also came out in my interview with the scholar Viktor Stepanovich Solov'ev, who, when I asked him about the party system of lecturers which he directed in the Mari ASSR for twenty years between 1971 and 1991, mentioned the red corners as one of the factors that made life on the collective farms better and more like city jobs: a regulated work day, regular salaries, vacation leave, saunas, and red corners as break rooms as well as places where displays showed production data, food rations for livestock, and the plan for the year. Red corners where places where agitators and lecturers would come, where newspapers and brochures would be available. "The mood of people then was completely different from now – enjoying life (*zhizneradostnye*), sure of themselves," was how he concluded his description of the context in which lecturers did their work then (Interview notes, January 30, 2006). On the association of Soviet life with joyfulness and the efforts and resources invested by Stalin's government in producing and sustaining this association, see Petrone 2000.

by the regional committee (where they were either received from Moscow or created based on the materials of recent party congresses and central committee meetings) helped the collectives of individual enterprises *see* the goals they were supposed to be working towards, and the imperative to put these slogans on canvas and paper and decorate village streets and red corners with them offered a way to *be seen* by the center as already working toward these goals. Centralized agencies needed the information collected for posters and displays to create a sufficiently "concrete" picture of what was going on in the country. In this sense, posters, albums, and displays were tools of "legibility" as discussed by James Scott in his work on how modern states see. More particularly, they were part of what he calls the "aesthetic" dimension of this legibility. In Scotts terminology, an album or poster would be "an abbreviated visual image of efficiency," which allows "high modernist plans" to "travel" across the territory of the modernizing state (J. C. Scott 1998: 224-225). But by relying on manual replication in order to travel, I would argue, the albums and posters become not merely tools by which territory and population become legible to the state, but ways in which the state, its projects, and possibilities for participation in them, become imaginable to community members. What is more, the effort to give political slogans positive emotional overtones by visually associating them with "cheerful" colors and locally familiar faces suggests that Soviet methodicians were concerned with more than "legibility." Rather than merely conveying compact information about village achievements and the state projects they were a part of, visual materials were to persuade viewers of the value and of such projects and their prospects of success.

The legibility of concrete facts compacted into images and the persuasiveness of color and emotion are both implied in the term *nagljadnost'*. That both can be at odds with each other in practice is made clear by debates among scholars, bureaucrats, and methodicians about another kind of material often subsumed under the heading of *nagljadnost'*. Statistics, as we have seen, appeared on album pages and in lectures as aids in visualizing local achievements and their relationship to union-wide plans. In the next section, I will consider attempts at producing and using statistics in the service of atheist propaganda. In the late Soviet period, a rising number of empirical studies of religion and atheism presented propagandists with the question how much factual content was sufficient for a message to be comprehensible and persuasive, and at what point concreteness could exceed the bounds of the politically expedient.

Concrete numbers: statistics and empirical research on religion

The question whether empirical research or a priori laws of historical development provided better legibility for the course of socialist construction was debated at several points in Soviet history. James Scott assimilates statistics to techniques of "miniaturization," which produce an appearance of mastery over small, controllable environments, and enables bureaucrats to make up impressive reports about "notional villages" that may have very little to do with realities on the ground (J. C. Scott 1998: 258, 244). But Scott also notes that modernist governments want only so much information about local detail and complexity as remains manageable for bureaucratic governance and does not challenge high modernist grand narratives. From this perspective, too detailed, too scrupulously compiled, or too widely disseminated statistics

appear counterproductive, as the history of census-taking in the Soviet Union amply demonstrates (Hirsch 2005; Tishkov 2003). It is then not surprising that the usefulness of empirical statistical data was disputed in the Soviet Union at several points in time. Potential didactic uses of statistical data supported empiricists in their claims, but also forced them to devise ways to treat statistical data as illustrations of larger processes. A look at the use of statistics on religious belief in atheist propaganda shows how the search for intuitively persuasive methods fueled a greater curiosity for the concrete details of rural lives than some critics approved of. It also shows the impact which the future-oriented temporal dynamics of didactic interests had on this curiosity.

The first research projects in empirical sociology conducted in the Mari ASSR dealt with religious beliefs and the spread of atheist convictions among the population. Viktor Solov'ev, whom we have encountered before as an atheist and party activist, returned from doctoral studies at the Institute of Scientific Atheism at Moscow's Academy of Social Sciences in 1971, in order to carry out a study of the "Everyday life, culture, national traditions, and beliefs of the population of the Mari ASSR" (Solov'ev 1977), modeled on the example of a study his doctoral supervisor, Viktor Grigor'evich Pivovarov, had organized in Penza region in 1968-70 and in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1971-72 (Pivovarov 1971; 1974). Similar studies were subsequently carried out by students and associates of Pivovarov in six more regions of European Russia and Western Siberia,[22] as well as in parts of the Moldovan and Tadzhik Union Republics (Pivovarov 1976: 34). In the Mari ASSR, the study was repeated with a slightly modified questionnaire in 1985, and served as a model for post-Soviet studies of "religious consciousness" in 1994 and 2004 (Solov'ev 1987b; Shabykov et al. 2005).

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[22] These were Ivano-Frankovo, Brjansk, Tambov, Gor'kij, Krasnodar and Omsk regions.

It might seem self-evident that a state interested in suppressing religion would conduct research on the spread and causes of religiosity. Many of these particular studies focused on regions with multi-religious populations, and promised to answer the longstanding call for methods of atheist propaganda that were specific to particular religions and particular local circumstances.[23] But there were scholars and politicians in the Soviet Union who were opposed in principle to any kind of empirical research as a bourgeois practice that denied that Marxists already knew fully elaborated laws of history. The 1960s and early 1970s were a time when scholars interested in creating spaces for empiricist historical, ethnographic and sociological work were slowly gaining ground against those championing the all-explaining power of "philosophy" or "theory" (Firsov 2001; First 2008; Luehrmann 2005b; Markwick 2001; Shlapentokh 1987: 25). Empiricists had to walk a fine line between asserting a need for data on how the country was actually developing and not appearing to deny the laws of unilinear evolution laid out in historical materialism or to be looking for evidence of deviant popular opinion.

One group of people calling for detailed factual information consisted of lecturers and other people involved in pedagogical work. The Knowledge Society had pointed to the need for lectures based on "local materials" from the time of its founding, with the

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[23] As an example of calls for such approaches at RSFSR-wide events, Z.S. Akhmerov, an instructor at the Elabuga teachers college in the Tatar ASSR, noted in his talk at a conference on "Questions of communist education in national schools" organized in 1965 by the Institute for the study of national schools of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the RSFSR, that schools in the Tatar ASSR tended to "unmask" only Christianity in their atheist curriculum, while "Islam is only 'slightly' criticized, without a spirit of militant atheism" (Akhmerov 1965: 22). The talk goes on to sketch a narrative of the origin and spread of Islam critiqued from the point of view of feudalist class interests. In 1969, the sector for propaganda and agitation of the Tatar regional committee and the Tatar division of the Knowledge Society organized a three-day seminar for lecturers specializing in the critique of Islam. One of the talks was "The spiritual world of the contemporary Muslim (from the experience of sociological studies)" (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 220, l. 355 – Program of the seminar, June 9-11, 1969). In the Mari republic, the absence of local studies of the state of religiosity was noted as a factor hampering "deep and many-sided" atheist work both by the Knowledge Society (GARME, f. 737, op. 2, d. 161, l. 8 – Information on the state of scientific-atheist propaganda carried out by the Mari organization of the Knowledge Society for the period from 1960-63 [source of quote]), and lecture materials about Mari paganism were created.

assumption that such local focus would make the lecture more convincing.[24] Records of

the Knowledge Society show that it was involved in some early projects of "concrete-

sociological research," designed to combine information-gathering with the shaping of

opinion.[25] Bearing the marks of the same populist atmosphere of the Khrushchev era as

the campaign for a church closing discussed in chapter 3, these research projects had a

more participatory character than the more professional and positivist surveys of later

times. For instance, workers' conferences co-organized by the Knowledge Society and

the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences early in 1963 served the

dual purpose of gathering material for a book on "the spiritual world" of people in the

transition from socialism to communism (Stepanjan 1966) and generating enthusiasm

among the workers for the task of building communism by 1980, in line with the promise

of the 1961 Party Program.[26] "Progressive workers" in 25 factories throughout the Soviet

Union discussed draft materials for the proposed volume, and made presentations on the

spiritual lives of their collectives that were then included as "concrete-sociological

material" in the book.[27] Like the creation and circulation of albums, this research project

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[24] An example of such a call from the Mari ASSR is GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 128, l. 18 (Stenographic transcript of membership meeting of the Mari division of the All-Union Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, November 24, 1948). Later the insertion of local materials became an obligatory part of every lecture, even to the point of absurdity. The planetarium lecturer in Joshkar-Ola recalled that one of her lectures on the planet Venus was once rejected by the Knowledge Society because it contained no local material on the Mari ASSR. It took the intervention of the liaison between Knowledge Society and regional party committee to allow her to go ahead with the lecture (Interview notes, January 30, 2006).

[25] Ignoring these early experiments, the émigré sociologist Vladimir Shlapentokh traces a genealogy of empirical sociology that goes back to surveys of readers' preferences conducted by the newspaper *Izvestija* in 1966 and the journal *Literaturnaja gazeta* in 1968 and focuses on the work of the Institute of Sociology of the Soviet Academy of Sciences (founded in 1968), emphasizing the quasi-oppositional nature of public opinion surveys in a country where everyone was expected to be supportive of party policies and party-sponsored culture (Shlapentokh 1987: 168-170).

[26] The results of these conferences were discussed at a conference devoted to the book project, conducted in Moscow in May 1963 (GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314 – Stenograph of the scholarly conference "Laws of the formation and development of the spiritual life of communist society," May 9-11, 1963).

[27] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 41-44, statement by Ts.A. Stepanjan.

was a two-way process in which scholars in the service of the state were searching for information, but also trying to stimulate and document processes of intellectual and emotional engagement among those who were being studied.

Discussions at this conference showed what a mixed reception these empirical experiments received among Soviet scholars. Volume editor Tsolak Stepanjan claims that the presentations of many of the workers were "extremely contentful (*iskljuchitel'no soderzhatel'nye*)," and another organizer of the conferences reported enthusiastically that learning about the practices of "collaboration and mutual aid" in multi-ethnic work collectives helped him assign *positive* content to the term communist social relations, rather than defining it in negative terms of "liquidating class differences between intellectual and physical labor, differences between town and country."[28] Other speakers at the conference are more skeptical of the value of such materials, saying that the "theoretical level of the study" had to be improved.[29] In his opening statement, the philosopher-economist Academician Petr Nikolaevich Fedoseev, who opened the discussion of the volume, said that "facts from particular conversations with workers" could at best "enliven" the account, because these facts had to be interpreted within the right philosophical and temporal framework:

> [W]hat is needed is a philosophical sociological analysis from the angle of vision of what is happening, from the angle of vision of what is to come, what are the tendencies of development and how we can practically assist in the education and formation of the new human being, in the development of the spiritual life of socialist society.[30]

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[28] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 462, statement by F.V. Konstantinov.
[29] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 81, statement by Fedorova.
[30] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 17, introductory remarks by P.N. Fedoseev.

Stepanjan's response to this critique defended the ability of empirical research to provide insight into future developments. Under conditions of mature socialist society preparing for the transition for communism, he claimed, consciousness no longer merely reflected being, but could advance ahead of it – progressive workers in socialist society could already have a "communist" consciousness (cf. Stepanjan 1963). The current epoch was characterized by "the all-round development of personality and the final overcoming of survivals of the past." Under the unprecedented social developments of advanced socialism, present ideas could point to future ways of being.[31]

By the time of the studies of religion and atheism in the Mari ASSR, the participatory elements had receded from research design, but the challenge of using empirical material to catch a glimpse of the future rather than the present remained. The search for methods to make a society that does not yet exist available for scholarly study and conceptualization is not unlike the use of visual materials and figurative speech to make abstract phenomena visible, but calls for a more pronounced temporal dynamism. As the psychologist Platonov claimed at the 1963 conference, the task of "scientific prognostics" was to measure "typicality not by the statistics of today, but dynamic typicality – typicality for tendencies of development."[32]

Like Stepanjan and his collaborators, the research teams under Pivovarov turned to empirical methods in their search for indications of what the spiritual life of an atheist communist society might look like. Similar to Stepanjan's, their search led them to confronted the question of how to deal with phenomena that seemed to be persistent rather than changing and hence looked like "survivals of the past." One speaker at the

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[31] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 34, statement by Stepanjan.
[32] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 284-285, statement by Platonov.

1963 conference had cited the fact that 40 percent of the Soviet population were religious

believers as proof that the "unity of consciousness" posited by the authors of the volume

had not yet been reached.[33] He outlined a rationale for empirical studies of the processes

through which survivals persisted that remained relevant for Pivovarov's work almost ten

years later: "But can we count that simply as a question of inertia, a question of the

vitality of these survivals or are there such phenomena even in the present which nourish

this survival and reproduce it."[34]

Pivovarov's attempted to illuminate the present phenomena which nourished

religious faith, and those which induced people to abandon it. They collaborated closely

with party and state networks in data collection, with the promise of providing knowledge

that would be useful to the organizations involved in planning didactic interventions. The

large number of interviewers required for the studies (more than 600 in the case of the

Mari ASSR) were coordinated by district and city party committees, and drawn mainly

from rural teachers and cultural workers.[35] Newspaper articles introducing the project to

the population and calling for suggestions and support preceded the period of data

gathering, and preliminary discussions of the questionnaire with members of the

intelligentsia of various districts solicited their input, in preservation of some of the

participatory forms of older projects (Pivovarov 1971; Solov'ev 1977: 41-42).[36]

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[33] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 454, statement by F.V. Konstantinov.
[34] GARF, f. R-9547, op. 1, d. 1314, l. 457, statement by F.V. Konstantinov.
[35] The district and city committees were instructed to assist in the resolution of the Bureau of the regional party committee which announced the beginning of the research project. In the Mari ASSR, such a resolution was passed on April 25, 1972 (GARME, f. P-1, op. 37, d. 29, l. 6 – Minutes of the meeting of the Bureau of the regional committee, May 10, 1972). Paper for the printing of the questionnaires was also provided by the Mari regional committee (Notes on interview with Viktor Solov'ev, March 24, 2005).
[36] See *Marijskaja Pravda*, August 2, 1972, pp. 2-3. In an interview with me, Viktor Solov'ev pointed to information on the research project through press and radio coverage, which explained the purposes of the study and the guaranteed anonymity of answers, as one reason why he did not think interviewees' answers might downplay actual religiosity and exaggerate numbers of participation in party or trade union activities

The questionnaires used in the studies were lengthy – the one used in the Mari

ASSR in 1972 contained 336 questions, somewhat shorted to 259 in 1985 – and

encompassed questions about age, education, profession, use of cultural facilities and

manufactured goods, participation in political and social work, knowledge and evaluation

of national and religious traditions, evaluation of inter-ethnic relations, before getting to

issues of religious faith and observance of prayers and feast days (Pivovarov 1974: 170-

208; Solov'ev 1977: 13; 1987: 15).[37] The complicated methodology of data analysis,

including early forms of computer technology, established statistical correlations between

different sets of questions, for instance those concerning religious belief and those

concerning social involvement or education. The studies thus sought to provide the kinds

of "dynamic" statistics called for by Platonov, which would show developmental

tendencies in addition to present conditions. The authors aspired to generate evidence for

the reasons why people held, gained, or abandoned religious or atheist convictions, and

how religion or atheism influenced their lives (Solov'ev 1977: 45; 1987: 25-31).

As noted in chapter 1, Solov'ev's studies concluded that religious believers were

more likely to be cut off from such social activities as participation in the Komsomol or

trade unions, visits to the cinema or libraries, and that atheists were less likely to

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and cultured leisure pursuits (Interview notes, March 24, 2005). The article states that the decision of the Mari regional committee to carry out the research project was based on the "need for sociological information for the purposes of economic, political, and ideological activity" and that its purpose was "the study of the spiritual world of the toilers and the development on this basis of practical recommendations for the improvement of educational work."

[37] The questionnaire was intended to be filled out by the interviewer, who was instructed to read the questions to the respondent, and if necessary translate the questions, which were printed only in Russian. Both the organization of a large-scale interview project with help from local party organizations, and the style of interview in which the interviewer interpreted the questions to the respondent and marked the responses on the printed questionnaire were similar to the methods used in the Soviet censuses that had been carried out in 1926, 1937, 1939, 1959 and 1970 (see Hirsch 2005: 123-131). Tellingly for my argument about the relationship between statistics and visualization techniques, the 1926 census was described by the member of the Central Statistical Administration Valerian Osinskij as a "momentary photograph" of the Soviet population on a single day (quoted in Hirsch 2005: 124).

disapprove of inter-ethnic marriage. By attempting to show a correlation between

religiosity and social isolation, he provided atheist propagandists with arguments for the

benefits of atheism that went beyond anti-clerical denunciations of religion.[38] Questions

about nationality, religious confession, and knowledge of and evaluation of "national

traditions" were also intended to enable propagandists to adapt their approaches to

audiences of different confessions and nationalities, and to help policy makers separate

harmful religious survivals from useful cultural traditions (Solov'ev 1977: 22).

The contested development of empirical social science in the Soviet Union shows

the quest to compile statistics from a different angle than as a technology of rule

employed by states and colonial administrations (Appadurai 1993; Hirsch 2005; J. C.

Scott 1998). The most attentive users of the data generated by atheist sociology seem to

have been not administrators, but lecturers and other methodicians. As early as 1966, the

atheist section of the Mari division of the Knowledge Society held a meeting where one

of their members presented the "method of concrete-sociological research," based on a

seminar he had attended in Moscow.[39] When party officials showed an interest in the

results of empirical studies, they seem to have foreseen applications that were mainly

didactic, if the discussion of the 1973 Mari survey at the July 1975 plenum of the

regional party committee is any indication. In the opening address about "the condition

and measures for improvement of the work of the regional party organization in the

formation of ideological conviction of the toilers (*po vospitaniju idejnoj ubezhdennosti*

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[38] In the publication of the 1985 study, Solov'ev admits that part of the statistical differences between religious believers and atheists in social participation and views on interethnic relations are consequences of the fact that professed religious believers tended to be older, more rural and less educated than professed atheists. The data analysis of the 1985 study controlled for these differences, which decreased the differences between believers and non-believers, but differences still remained, for instance 10.5% of believers were critical of interethnic marriage, compared to 3.2% of atheists (Solov'ev 1987: 30-31, 144).
[39] GARME, f. R-737, op. 2, d. 161, l. 59 (Minutes of the meeting of the Scientific-Methodical Council on atheist propaganda, July 5, 1966).

trudjashchikhsja),” Second Secretary I. S. Gusev retrospectively takes the research

project, carried out in 1973-74, as his prime example of how the republic is improving

ideological education in response to the Central Committee’s fall 1974 resolution “On the

work of selection and formation of ideological cadres in the Belorussian party

organization.”[40]

Predictably, the secretary and other speakers at this plenum pay less attention to

methodical complexities than the scholars who carried out the study – where the

sociologists, for instance, fully recognize the methodological challenges of demonstrating

dynamic tendencies and motivations of change (and try to address them through long-

term repeated research and questions that trace personal development over time), the

party activists content themselves with citing figures for one year and claiming that they

either represent an overall tendency for the better, or anachronisms in need of

pedagogical intervention: if 4.7 percent of teachers and 15.6 percent of medical

professionals call themselves religious believers or people wavering between belief and

unbelief, if some of the participants in the movement for a communist attitude to work

are neither fulfilling their social assignments nor enrolled in a program of study to

improve their qualifications, if 15 percent of white-collar workers did not read a single

book during the month that the study was carried out, or if 26 percent of party members

had icons in their home,[41] these are effects of long-term habit and the influence of older

generations that must be removed in the name of progress:

> A person who has linked his life to the party of Lenin, to please his mother-in-law
> or whomever else, lives year in year out under the god-corner with the image of

[40] GARME, f. P-1, op. 41, d. 27, l. 3 (Stenographic transcript of the 7th Plenum of the Mari regional
committee, July 25, 1972).
[41] GARME, f. P-1, op. 41, d. 27, l. 31-32, 45, 89.

the mother of god or Nicholas the miracleworker, and we consider him an ideological fighter for the policies of the party. […] We need a serious reorganization (*perestrojka*) of the work with forming a scientific worldview, of atheist education, of the organization of the study of problems of atheism and religion by Komsomol members and communists, diverse groups of the intelligentsia, by all categories of toilers.[42]

In conclusion, the Second Secretary gives the division of propaganda and agitation an assignment to create a number of instructional materials based on the research results for the party activists in the districts, and resolves to strengthen the role of social science departments in the republic's research institute and institutions of higher education.[43] What concrete statistics enabled officials to see, then, was sometimes inconvenient. But devices of anachronism and reliance on the promises of education helped cast details that did not fit into the overall narrative as temporary paradoxes that would eventually vanish, if proper action was taken. The regional party committee could thus demonstrate to its superiors in the Central Committee that it was making progress in areas identified as important in union-wide resolutions, while providing prescriptions for future tasks to subordinates at the regional and district level.

Being himself involved in educational work through the Knowledge Society and the group of party lecturers, Solov'ev was motivated to look more carefully at phenomena of contemporary religiosity than these political readers. Much like western scholarship on secularization, he argued that not every instance of religiosity was a survival of the past, but that religious practice was being affected by the spread of atheism. One such effect was the "indifferentism towards religion" that was caused by young Soviet citizens "not having experienced on themselves the corrupting influence of religion" (Solov'ev 1977: 107). It was this indifferentism, Solov'ev argued, that often

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[42] GARME, f. P-1, op. 41, d. 27, l. 32.
[43] GARME, f. P-1, op. 41, d. 27, l. 36, 72-75.

made young people agree to participate in religious ceremonies such as baptisms or religious burials. The 1973 study showed that more than half the young parents who had baptized their children claimed not to be religious believers, something Solov'ev interpreted as evidence that decreasing experience with religious institutions could pose its own problems for the development of atheism, calling for even more wide-ranging didactic solutions: "It is not enough to liberate a person from the captivity of religious ideas, it is necessary to provide for his all-round spiritual development" (Solov'ev 1977: 110).

Methodicians could afford to look harder at empirical findings and challenge celebratory views of Soviet progress, because the default solution was always more educational effort. For instance, the Mari atheist lecturer Nikolaj Sofronov interpreted religiosity among rural old people not simply as the persistence of old habits among older generations, but as a consequence of their increasing marginalization in the modernizing village. Quoting a 73-year-old collective farm worker interviewed in a smaller-scale study of four districts in the Mari ASSR, who said that she had no other place to go than the church because young people would laugh at her when she went to the club, he argued that cultural work in the villages had to be expanded to offer a greater diversity of events targeted to different parts of the population (Sofronov 1973: 27, 30). Along with being self-serving, the interpretations of these applied sociologists certainly remained within the limits of Soviet assumptions about the progressive nature of atheism and the backward force of religion. But the point is that in a context where the capacity of empirical facts to contribute to the formulation of theoretical laws was contested, didactic practitioners favored empirical exploration.

These debates about empiricism show some of the peculiarities of didacticist engagement with the world. On the one hand, the interest of methodicians in reshaping their audience, generated interest in the kind of concrete facts that some philosophers were still inclined to dismiss as mere distractions from universal laws of historical development. On the other hand, as professionals intent on changing their contemporaries, methodicians were most interested in something that, some scholars would argue, purely empirical observation can never provide – evidence of dynamic processes, trajectories of future development (cf. Miyazaki 2004). As Katerina Clark (1981) has noted, the task of writing about contemporary social reality through the lens of expected future transformations was the basic paradox of "socialist realism" in Stalin-era fiction. In their understanding of images and statistics as devices with the dual capacity to bundle empirical information and exert persuasive influence, late Soviet methodicians turned this temporal paradox into a pedagogical challenge.

The flexibility of didacticism

That people engaged in changing others should find it necessary to take an interest in their present condition is a familiar point from studies of Christian missions (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Fienup-Riordan 1991; Keane 2007). What I would like to stress here is that its grounding in a tradition of didactic engagement with the empirical world gave Soviet approaches to propaganda a greater adaptability and a different kind of effectiveness than is often recognized. Be it the creation and circulation of images or the production and use of statistics, the quest for didactic tools always brought methodicians back to local talents, historically evolved pathways of circulation, and the question of

how to see universal trajectories in contemporary reality. In the course of finding ad-hoc solutions to shortages and misfits, they brought new participants into their educational work.

A similar combination of a universalist message and consistent organizational model with adaptation to local possibilities has been noted for evangelical Protestants, in particular Pentecostals, where it is often seen as a key to their successful expansion (D. Martin 1990, 2002; Robbins 2004). Though Soviet cultural enlightenment work is not currently considered an expanding movement, it may be instructive to compare the image of an itinerant Baptist preacher visiting a small, unregistered congregation in early-twenty-first-century Joshkar-Ola with the instructions for Soviet lecturers we have encountered in this chapter. In figure 5.9, the preacher stands Bible in hand at a hand-made podium, next to a portable book display and in front of a poster proclaiming "The righteous will live by faith. Hebrews 10, 38" in hand-painted blue letters. A calendar donated by a German sister congregation attests to the international connections of this otherwise ostentatiously self-sufficient group. The preacher is thus surrounded by a material culture indicative of the portable organizational model of evangelical Protestantism. But if one ignores the text on the poster and the titles of the books, one could easily mistake this preacher for a model lecturer, who has taken responsibility for introducing his audience to "the ever-growing number of accessible informational forms" (Bis'ko 1978: 9).

In their material culture as well as their structural model, organizations such as the Knowledge Society were oriented toward the same portable universalism that is said to be among the reasons for the dynamic growth of evangelical churches. Soviet lecturers

Figure 5.9: Traveling Baptist preacher in Joshkar-Ola, June 2005.

may have been more bound by centralized plans than evangelical church planters, but materials in this chapter show that they were often left to their own devices when it came to putting the plans into action. The need to operationalize local facts and talents as didactic tools made late Soviet cultural work less removed from life and inconsequential than it is often described and remembered, as the appearance of a visual aid in a post-Soviet dream report may attest. As we will see in the following section, the effects of didactic habits can lie in unexpected places, manifesting themselves in religious concerns with the power of images and in approaches to liturgical performance.

PART III

SUSPICIONS

Chapter 6

Images and imaginaries

The three chapters in the previous section have outlined some of the ways in which didactic concerns animated late Soviet cultural-enlightenment work and post-Soviet religious life. I have located elective affinities between both settings mainly on the level of structural analogies between the snowballing networks of personal teacher-student relationships which are used to carry centrally controlled truths into expanding peripheries. Socialism and evangelical Protestantism seem to have developed similar strategies of flexible growth as a result of overlapping histories of building world-transforming organizations under conditions of political, social, or economic marginality. Chimarij activists try to harness the power of didactic networks in the service of a post-Soviet revival.

But the implications of didacticism go beyond organizational structure. We have already encountered some of its further characteristics: the future-oriented temporality of classroom interactions, for instance, and the peculiar tension between an egalitarian anthropology of self-made personhood and the discipline imposed through methodical prescriptions and teachers' authority. In the previous chapter, I have explored a particular

understanding of the pedagogical potential of sight, expressed in a concern with perceptible facts as tools to convince audiences of the reality and relevance of long-term processes and abstract phenomena. What such an equation of sight with persuasion means for religious practice is the topic of this chapter, opening up an exploration of postsecular anxieties about authority and manipulation to be continued in chapter 7.

Seeing and imagining in post-Soviet religion

If Soviet propagandists and scholars were concerned with making their audiences see phenomena that either had no visible shape at all (such as "imperialism" or "communist social relations") or that were happening out of sight (such as the launching of a space rocket or the work of the Central Committee), one may see a parallel to religious uses of imagery for giving visible shape to invisible beings and mythical events.[1] But not all religious traditions treat images as primarily objects of sight, and when they do, then not necessarily as prompts for visualizing invisible abstractions. In fact, the preoccupation of religious practitioners with the visual effects of imagery may well be one of the ways in which Soviet visual culture is alive in the self-understandings of post-Soviet religious practitioners in Marij El.

Atheist propagandists among traditionally Orthodox populations worked in an environment where images of saints, Jesus Christ, and events of sacred history were an

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[1] Valerie Kivelson and Joan Neuberger draw such a parallel in their introduction to a masterly collection of essays on Russian visual culture, where they argue that an understanding of visuality which they call "seeing into being" is characteristic both of "the transcendent viewing experience associated with medieval and early modern religious imagery" and of "the transformative quality ascribed to Soviet socialist realism" (Kivelson and Neuberger 2008: 6). This specific analogy is more illuminating than the more common undifferentiated equations of icons and political posters (cf. Bonnell 1997). But I would still emphasize that very different meanings of transformation lie hidden behind the adjectives "transcendent" and "transformative," and that a crucial difference between icons and Soviet images is that the latter exist purely to be seen, whereas sight is only one of many ways of interacting with icons.

integral part of religious practices. Before the revolution, and far beyond it in many

places, virtually every house in rural Russia had a "red" or "beautiful corner" (*krasnyj*

ugol) where icons were kept on a shelf or in a case (*bozhnitsa*), before which the

inhabitants of the house performed their prayers (Tsekhanskaja 2004). As late as 1967,

the Commissioner for religious affairs in the Mari ASSR claimed that most houses in the

republic had icons.[2] Icons were also found in churches, and were carried outside the

churches during icon processions (which Soviet law restricted to church grounds) and

funerals. They were thus a visible and potentially public symbol of religious practice and

belief, and it is not surprising that much anti-religious work targeted them. Denouncing

the veneration of bleeding, weeping or oil-exuding icons was one of the standard features

of atheist propaganda. In the Mari ASSR and elsewhere, chemical experiments

demonstrating how substances resembling blood, tears, and oil could be deliberately

made to appear by deceptive priests were part of the evenings of "Miracles without

miracles" (Nekhoroshkov 1964).

　　　As explained in chapter 2, the effectiveness of the denunciatory approach of the

"Miracles" was disputed even among atheist propagandists, and the more thoughtful

among them certainly realized that the persistence of icon veneration could not be

explained by deception alone. Taking recourse to theories of *nagljadnost'* which

emphasized the psychological influence of images on viewers, atheist scholars often

interpreted icons as the propaganda tools of the church, analogous to Soviet posters and

banners. The following analysis of the perfidious influence of icons by Mikhail

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[2] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 80, l. 219 (Report on the state of religiosity among women from
Commissioner of Religious Affairs Savel'ev to the first Secretary of the Mari Regional Committee and the
Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Mari ASSR, June 16, 1967). The questionnaires of Solov'ev's
studies in 1973 and 1985 included questions about icons in the home, and the 1973 study showed that 40
percent of Komsomol members lived in households with icons (Solov'ev 1977: 108).

Nekhoroshkov repeatedly mentions the eyes and processes of sight as channels of interaction between humans and icons, in order to construct an argument that the icon is a way for "church people" to influence people's thoughts and behavior in the most intimate spheres of life:

> The veneration of icons was inculcated in children from the earliest age. As a rule, icons were *colorful*, with a *shiny* wreath around the image, which unwittingly *attracted the interest and attention* of the children. In all the most important events in a person's life the icon inevitably participated. [...] All family members several times daily went down on their knees and prayed, *looking at the icon*, asking god to send down a better life and health. [...] Everyone who came into the house *turned his eyes* first of all towards the god-shelf [*bozhnitsa*], to the icons, and finding them, crossed himself, bowed and only after this greeted the inhabitants of the house. (Nekhoroshkov 1967b: 15, my italics)

Nekhoroshkov interprets icons as "visual aids," enhancing the effect of ideological messages on audiences through long-term emotional impact. Post-Soviet Protestant critiques of icon veneration often display similarly psychological understandings of icons, seeing them as persuasive tools to induce the viewer to worship the object depicted. For instance, the Finnish pastor of the Lutheran church pointed out that Orthodox churches have images of "many, many saints," whereas the interior of the Lutheran church was simply and unambiguously dominated by the cross and the image of Jesus. He thus implied that icons made it difficult to determine, or concentrate on, the real object of worship.[3] A middle-aged Mari woman remembered her confusion in front of the icons in Orthodox churches she visited before joining the Charismatic Christian Center: "Back then we went to an Orthodox church and asked, who is the main god here? Here is

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[3] Field notes, March 15, 2005.

God's mother, also a god; here is Nicholas the Miracleworker, he works miracles, that means also a god. Who is the strongest of them?"[4]

While it is not surprising that secularist and inter-confessional critiques of religious practices can echo each other, it is interesting that the view of icons as didactic aids working primarily through channels of sight is also taken up by Orthodox defenders of icon veneration, who seem to find this aspect of icon veneration easiest to defend. For instance, during a dispute in the Christian Center between representatives of Joshkar-Ola's Protestant churches and Orthodox priests, Father Oleg Stenjaev from Moscow answered critical questions about icon veneration by relating a conversation he once had with a Baptist woman:

> She says: "I don't need icons, Christ is in my heart." I asked her: "And what does he look like?" You know, this woman got confused a little bit, and says: "He is not very tall, red-headed." And somehow got even more disturbed. I say: "What is bothering you?" She says: "He looks like one man. When I was young I knew this one man. He was some kind of accountant, very religious." [...] When we speak about Christ, whether we want to have icons or not, in the consciousness of each of us some kind of image arises. One young Orthodox boy, he was thirteen, went to see the film by Zeffirelli, *Jesus of Nazareth*. And then for a whole month he could not free himself from that hallucination. He says: I get on my knees to pray and I have, he says, that actor before my eyes, and there's nothing I can do about it. The icon exists to filter out this sensual image, sensual apprehension. It shows another world, in a way. And sensuality goes to the sidelines a little bit. And what if not icon painters are pastor Timofej and pastor Sergij [Timofej and Sergej are the names of his Protestant opponents] when they tell about Christ in their sermon? He is crucified, the hands, legs pierced by nails, a crown of thorns on his head?[5]

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[4] Field notes, March 12, 2005.
[5] Transcript of an audiorecording of the discussion (without exact date, ca. 2003) provided by the Missionary Department, Orthodox Diocese of Joshkar-Ola and Marij El. As far as I know, only one such public dispute was carried out in Joshkar-Ola. A lay staff member of the Missionary Department of the Orthodox diocese explained to me that the diocese had decided that such public engagement with Protestant ideas gave too much recognition to the Protestant presence in the republic.

This priest draws a distinction between ordinary sense perception and the kinds of perceptions one should have while praying – a distinction important to Orthodox evaluations of liturgical practices, as we will see in the next chapter. Within this distinction, he describes icons as keeping in check the less worthy mental images that will distract even in the most iconoclastic worshiper. An *Anti-sectarian Notebook* designed to help Orthodox Christians counter the arguments evangelical Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses also justifies the veneration of icons by comparing them to visual media familiar to inhabitants of contemporary Russia, and explaining their function in terms of the emotional effects of visual perception: "A mother who kisses the photograph of her son," the defender of Orthodoxy is encouraged to say to the sectarian critic, "does not cause your disgust. Why then is an Orthodox Christian kissing the image of the Savior an idol-worshiper?" (Rubskij 2003: 94).

    With these interpretations, defenders of icon veneration present a very selective view of traditions of using sacred images in Russia. Icons have of course been perceived as visual media before the Soviet period, but they have also always been more than that. The historian Vera Shevzov (2004: 174-175, 177, 232-233) notes several cases from nineteenth-century Russia in which *icons* of Mary appeared, and sometimes spoke, to people in dreams or visions. In other cases, Mary or another saint appeared as a human being, but directed the dreamer to an icon that was hidden or had been forgotten (Shevzov 2004: 224-225). In these dreams, icons seem to play a similar role as the colorful poster with writing on it that reportedly appeared to the dormitory manager's dying husband. But upon closer reflection, important differences emerge. First of all, the poster in the dying man's dream is purely a visual medium, and his interaction with it is

limited to reading the text on it. The icons in the dreams from nineteenth-century sources are visually recognizable as representations of Mary, but they also speak, move, and effect miraculous healings. They have autonomous agency, and they exercise this agency as material objects, rather than exclusively as visual images.

A look at folk practices in Marij El confirms that Soviet and post-Soviet polemics miss crucial aspects of icon veneration when they focus on the sense of sight. In churches and during processions, devotees touch icons, pass under them, or place objects on them to take them home, all ways of obtaining blessing and healing that do not require looking at the icon (cf. figure 6.1; see also Tsekhanskaja 2004). In W.J.T. Mitchell's distinction between "pictures" as physical media that hang on the wall and the "images" that are

Figure 6.1: Icon procession with the icon of the Smolensk Mother of God from the church of St. Gurij in Pet"jal, passing through a village in Volzhsk district. June 2005. Locals and pilgrims bend down to receive Mary's blessing as priests carry her icon over them.

visually displayed on them, the icon's character as a flat, rectangular, tangible picture matters in many of those interactions at least as much as the image (Mitchell 1994).

Even icons kept in the house, contrary to how the atheist scholar Nekhoroshkov describes them, remain largely unseen for much of the year in the rural areas of the Volga region. In Mari villages, most houses I visited had icon corners, regardless of whether or not the inhabitants were baptized Christians. In most cases, the shelf supporting one or more icons, along with other powerful objects such as Palm Sunday twigs, Easter eggs, and vials of holy water was fitted into the corner opposite the entrance door, shielded off by a lavishly embroidered curtain that created a niche in which the icons were barely discernible (fig. 6.2). The curtain was lifted up during those feast days and family events

Figure 6.2: Icon corner in a Mari household in Bajsa village, Kirov region. June 2005. Barely discernible below the curtain are two small icons, four colored eggs, and a prayer book. The twigs visible above the curtain are gathered on Palm Sunday and kept in the house for the year to guard against fire and lightning.

which require candles to be lit in front of the icons, but for most of the year the flowers on the curtain were far more visible than the images behind them, making the corner a visually dominating feature of the room, but preventing the kind of intense visual interaction with the icons that is crucial to Nekhoroshkov's idea of their effect.

Curtained icon corners are by no means unique to the Mari, but are also common in Russian households of the Volga region and parts of central Russia. In other regions, icons are decorated with embroidered kerchiefs, which may also be used for covering them. Various ways of covering the icons are often explained by the desire of the inhabitants of a house not to be seen by "the gods" in all their daily undertakings, i.e. to limit and direct the contact with divine forces which the icons make present. A slightly different rationale is suggested by an Old Believer in Jurino district in the Mari Republic, who told folklorist Marina Kopylova in 2004 that she closed off her icons with a curtain because "they can still see us anyway," whereas passers-by looking in from the street would not see the icons and be tempted to steal them (Tsekhanskaja 2004: 130-131; Marina Kopylova, personal communication, January 4, 2007).

Both explanations treat sight as an important aspect of the relationship between the residents of a house and their icons – but what matters is the image's own capacity to see, a dimension of visuality which is at least theoretically absent from Soviet didactic uses of images,[6] and which is also largely missing from the explanations of contemporary defenders of icon veneration. For some rural residents, sacred corners could even work without any image in them at all. Visiting a house in the village of Shorun'zha, I saw the familiar embroidered curtain partitioning off a corner that contained no icon, but merely a

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[6] But see Plamper forthcoming on Stalin-era ideas that the Soviet leader's ubiquitous portrait could see what was going on in offices and homes.

candle fixed to a narrow board fitted across the angle. When I asked why there were no icons, the owner's sister, herself visiting, answered: "Oh, they simply haven't bought one." Her sister-in-law, the lady of the house, added: "We'll have to order one. Or no, they sell them in the church, you can buy them there."[7]

As I later learned, she and her husband had built the house seventeen years ago, so they had obviously felt no great need for icons, and their professed intention to buy one may have been mainly for my benefit as a stranger with unknown religious sympathies. But the point is that the corner worked well for them without an image in it – family videos showed that the curtain was lifted and the candle lit in it for birthdays and other important events in the lives of family members, as would be done in front of the icon in other households. Even though residents of villages in which Orthodoxy has more of a foothold would probably not consider icons so dispensable, the fact that the use of an icon-less corner can be very similar to one with an icon seems to resonate with Margaret Paxson's claim that in rural Russian households, "it is not strictly the case that the corner of the home is powerful because the icon resides therein; but the icon is powerful at least in part because of its placement in the corner" (Paxson 2005: 219). The forces that make the corner a powerful place in the house add a dimension to the icon that goes beyond its visual appearance, but also beyond its materiality.

Exemplary images: *nagljadka* and *nagljadnost'*

In the Mari countryside and elsewhere in Russia, icons differ from posters in being not always and exclusively visual media, and not always and exclusively didactic tools. Rather, the treatment of icons is reminiscent of what the art historian Hans Belting calls

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[7] Field notes, January 14, 2006.

an idea of image-as-presence (rather than image-as-representation). In this understanding, which Byzantine icon venerators shared with more widespread traditions in the Mediterranean world and beyond, the image is not primarily a visual reminder of a loved or venerated person, but a way in which absent beings – be they ancestors, the emperor, or gods – could extend their persons across ontological, geographical, and temporal divides. Visual resemblance of image and prototype is not necessarily decisive for images to work in this way, nor are channels of sight the most important way of interacting with them. An image might be hidden in a sanctuary, behind a curtain or in a box, visible only to certain people or at certain times; touching the image or an object that has been in contact with it may be an integral part of partaking in its power, in addition to or even instead of looking at it (Belting 2000: 54-59, 2001; see also Gell 1998: 96-99, 116-121, 136). While this understanding seems to emphasize the aspect of the image as material medium (or "picture"), the example of the empty corner in Shorun'zha shows that sometimes the separated space alone can work to create a presence, with no need for any perceptible image at all.

When post-Soviet defenders of icon veneration such as Oleg Stenjaev present icons as visual aids for focusing the imagination while praying, they privilege aspects of the theology of the icon that fail to account for tactile interactions. At the same time, they are not inventing anything new, and nor are they completely assimilating icon veneration to secular didactic practices. The Orthodox theology of icon veneration can provide ancient precedent for a number of different understandings, because it reflects centuries of debate within Christianity and among those religions that inherited the Mosaic prohibition against the making of graven images (Besançon 1994; Ouspensky 1992). A

didactic understanding speaks from a letter written by the Byzantine Emperor Leo III to Caliph Omar II between 717 and 720, in answer to the latter's challenge to such Christian practices as the adoration of the cross and of images, he presented a sentimental and mnemonic justification for the "desire to conserve" images of the saints as exemplary people:

> We honor the cross because of the sufferings of the Word of God incarnate…. As for pictures, we do not give them a like respect, not having received in Holy Scriptures any commandment whatsoever in this regard. Nevertheless, finding in the Old Testament that divine command which authorized Moses to have executed in the Tabernacle the figures of the cherubim, and, animated by a sincere attachment for the disciples of the Lord who burned with love for the Savior Himself, we have always felt a desire to conserve their images, which have come down to us from their times as living representations. Their presence charms us, and we glorify God who has saved us by the intermediary of his Only-Begotten Son, who appeared in the world in a similar figure, and we glorify the saints. (Quoted in Meyendorff 2001a [1964]: 107, his ellipses)

This letter, written on the eve of the iconoclastic crisis which would preoccupy Byzantine politics and theology for much of the remainder of the eighth century, can lend ancient authority to the analogy between icons and photographs of loved ones from the *Anti-sectarian Notebook*. The idea that icons represent an authoritative tradition of what a saint actually looked like prefigures Oleg Stenjaev's insistence on canonically verified depictions. At the same time, the statement "their presence charms us" alludes to an understanding of image-as-presence that the post-Soviet explanations eschew.[8] And

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[8] During the same debate between Orthodox and Protestant clergy in Joshkar-Ola where Father Oleg Stenjaev participated, one of the local Orthodox priests confronted the issue of image-as-presence by explaining why St. Nicholas could hear and answer the prayers offered by Orthodox believers before his icons all over the world. The reason, he explained, was not that the saint was ever-present (an attribute reserved for God), but that both saint and devotees were part of the one body of the Church, which united living and dead Orthodox Christians. The need to resort to the abstraction of the church shows that the capacity of an image to mediate a presence is problematic for post-Soviet audiences (Transcript of an audiorecording of the discussion, ca. 2003, provided by the Missionary Department, Orthodox Diocese of Joshkar-Ola and Marij El).

although Leo certainly describes the icon as a guide in a learning process, the process of emulating a saint seems more akin to the pre-revolutionary meaning of learning through *nagljadka* than to the abstract representation of invisible phenomena implied in Soviet *nagljadnost'*.

Though Leo seems to consider visual resemblance as crucial for the present-making capacities of images, Stenjaev's claim that icons allow a special kind of vision, different from ordinary sensory perception, is entirely absent from this letter. Scholars have argued that it was in reaction to iconoclasm, and to the later hesychast controversy over the nature of the light that Jesus' disciples perceived during the transfiguration on Mount Tabor, that the idea that icons allow a spiritual vision of divine reality became established dogma (Belting 2000 [1990]: 166-177; Meyendorff 2001b [1982]). Such mystical interpretations of icons are common in contemporary Russian publications, and are often connected to calls for a return to the more restrained, reverse-perspective styles of Byzantium and pre-Petrine Russia, reversing the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century trend toward adopting conventions of western painting (Jazykova and Luka 2002; Kutejnikova 2005). The painters of the icon workshop of the Mari diocese participate in this return to styles that are considered to be specific to icon painting (Kudrjavtseva 2002). As Stenjaev's statement shows, the theological and aesthetic division between icons and ordinary objects of perception sight becomes important in the context of contemporary Christians' experiences with a range of visual media and anxieties about confusion between them.

It would thus be wrong to claim that those defenders of icon veneration who portray icons as didactic visual media are purely, or even primarily, drawing on Soviet

theories of *nagljadnost'*. Neither do they necessarily express an exclusively modern fascination with the visual and suspicion of its limitations (Jay 1993). Rather, this seems to be an example of an elective affinity brought about when evolving concerns from two separate areas of expertise suddenly speak to each other: the didactic aspects of icon veneration gain urgency and salience among people familiar with a pedagogical discourse that recognizes the importance of visual images. Instead of the "elective" crossing-over of chemical elements from old amalgamations into new, this affinity implies a *selective* reinforcement of those elements from two different discourses that support each other.

On the side of pedagogical theory, one of these elements is the idea that what is in front of a person's eyes is uniquely important for their inner state and motivation for action, as anyone with training in Soviet-era cultural work will have learned. The theology of the icon takes up this concern and offers icons as safe models to contemplate and emulate, different from those that dominate visual media culture. It thus preserves the idea of an icon as a personal exemplar (from whom one might learn through *nagljadka*), but also understands it as offering access to a particular vision of the world, which can be compared and contrasted to those offered by other visual media (*nagljadnost'*).[9] Stenjaev's warning about visual contemplation as an occasion for idolatry ("I get on my knees to pray and I have … that actor before my eyes") can be seen as an instance of this crossing of paths of pedagogical and theological traditions.

But no matter how much contemporary interpreters of icons emphasize their qualities as visual image over their qualities as material picture, another distinction

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[9] Caroline Humphrey (1997) finds that socialist modernization introduced a similar tension between learning from exemplars and through abstractions into Mongolians' understandings of morality. The relative absence of allegorical representations in the Orthodox tradition, different from western Christendom, where depicted persons may stand for abstract concepts such as faith or justice (Belting 2000: 525), may be connected to this personalized understanding of learning from exemplars.

between icons and visual aids remains. As the Soviet writings about the relationship between exterior and interior *nagljadnost'* discussed in the previous chapter have shown, the didactic value of images lies to a large degree in their capacity to stimulate the imagination, making audiences visualize abstract processes that images and numbers can merely hint at, but never fully show. Icons, on the other hand, serve to constrain the visual imagination by keeping it focused on a canonically approved depiction of a concrete, personal exemplar on the path to saintliness. The consequences of these different evaluations of visual imaginaries become clearer when we contrast Stenjaev's skepticism about film as a medium for representing the divine to the enthusiastic use made of it by supposedly iconoclastic Protestants.

Protestant imaginaries

As if to confirm Stenjaev's diagnosis of the unavoidable nature of images in today's world, Protestants in Joshkar-Ola enthusiastically use film to propagate their faith. In 2005, a Baptist church showed Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* on Maundy Thursday (according to the Orthodox calendar), and a montage of mute scenes from the same film formed the visual backdrop to a lengthy song about the sufferings of Christ during an Easter evangelizing concert organized by a Pentecostal church. Following immediately after these views of Christ being flagellated, carrying his cross through the streets of Jerusalem and dying painfully on the cross, the pastor's exhortation verbally developed the imagery, encouraging listeners to go even further in their visual imagination:

You know, it was no coincidence that Jesus died in just the way which you saw today in the scene from the movie. He was flogged, he was simply torn to pieces, the skin is taken off, there was not a living piece of flesh on him, the blood was flowing and pouring in streams, maybe he would even have died from loss of blood most of all. So much blood all around! Why such a death? Why blood? No forgiveness without bloodshed. You remember how we said in the beginning? Passover – that is the lamb which had to be brought as a sacrifice for sin, sacrifice for salvation.[10]

This style of preaching illustrates well what Stenjaev is referring to when calling Protestant preachers "icon painters." The visualizing descriptions in the sermon are probably inspired by the movie itself, and presuppose a familiarity of speaker and audience with visual portrayals of violent scenes in film. Like the rhetorical style described as "interior *nagljadnost'* ," in Soviet manuals, verbal imagery is used to stimulate the visual imagination and elicit emotional responses.[11]

Although he draws the analogy to icon painting, Stenjaev (an Orthodox priest known for his public polemics with various Protestant and Protestant-derived groups) is without doubt aware of Orthodox polemics against the western Christian tradition of visualizing biblical scenes, in particular those involving the suffering and death of Christ. A number of Orthodox thinkers have criticized this spiritual practice. Valerij Dukhanin, an instructor at a Siberian seminary writing with the blessing of the Archbishop of Tomsk and Asinovo,[12] points out in a polemical tract against Mel Gibson's film that focusing on

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[10] Tape of interdenominational Protestant Easter concert in the Puppet Theater, Joshkar-Ola, May 8, 2005.
[11] This preacher is a former officer of the Soviet army, and may well have received some formal or informal rhetorical training as part of his education. I interviewed him during my preliminary fieldwork in 2003, when I was not yet asking about such details of training, and was unable to get an appointment for a follow-up interview with him in 2005/06, owing to both of our traveling schedules.
[12] Lacking a centralized authority for deciding doctrinal questions comparable to the Vatican, the Orthodox Churches accommodate quite a broad diversity of opinion, and Orthodox print culture in contemporary Russia is no exception. For readers without specialized theological training, a sign of acceptability is the imprint "By the blessing of…" (followed by the name and title of a diocesan bishop, metropolitan, or the patriarch himself) at the beginning of a book, journal, or brochure. Individual bishops vary in the range of theological tendencies to which they give their blessing (cf. Mitrokhin 2004: 174-208). Well aware that a

the physical pain and suffering of Christ was never among the conventions of Byzantine and classical Russian iconography. From there, he develops the argument that the idea of actors impersonating Christ and Mary on the screen is an outgrowth of the long history of uncontrolled "daydreaming" (*mechtanie*) in western visual arts and spiritual practices, into which western Christendom was led after abandoning the possibilities for "grace-filled experience of communion with Christ" (*blagodatnyj opyt obshchenija s Khristom*) afforded by the liturgical and iconographic traditions of the Orthodox Church (Dukhanin 2005: 99). In the western tradition of such visionaries as Saint Teresa of Avila or the painters of the Renaissance and Baroque, "the spiritual was […] replaced by the soulful, prayerfulness was replaced by romanticism and sentimentality, contemplation by daydreaming" (Dukhanin 2005: 92).

I will come back to Dukhanin's division between the spiritual and the soulful in the next chapter. In essence, he argues that western Christians have to resort to their own imagination because they lack canonically established styles of icon painting and ascetic rules for the painters. He accuses western religious art of having abandoned earlier reservations against inserting faces of living human beings into the portraits of saints,[13] and juxtaposes western spiritual disciplines with the warnings of Byzantine church fathers and their nineteenth-century Russian interpreters against allowing images to arise in the mind during prayer. In particular, he quotes from the polemics of the nineteenth-

brochure like Dukhanin's reflects only a fraction of the wide spectrum of opinion among Orthodox Christians in Russia (he himself wrote it as a polemic against those clergy and laypeople who were using *The Passion of the Christ* in their missionary work) and that it is not a work of academic theology, I quote from it because it resonates with opinions about images, imaginaries, and prayer expressed by some of the active Orthodox laypeople I encountered in Joshkar-Ola and Moscow, and with treatments of spirituality and sensuality in Orthodox literature for sale in Joshkar-Ola.

[13] Though remaining stronger in Russia, these reservations were broken with increasing frequency from the eighteenth-century onward. Icons of St. Catherine with the face of the Empress Ekaterina, wife of Peter the Great, exemplify this tendency (Marker 2008).

century bishop Ignatij (Brjanchaninov, 1807-1861) against Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola, whose *Spiritual Exercises* contain instructions to visualize Christ, events from the Gospels, and heaven and hell (Dukhanin 2005: 98; see also A. I. Osipov 2001).

In insisting on the difference between icon veneration and western traditions of visualizing the divine, Dukhanin emphasizes the distinction between material and imaginary visual signs, as made by Lambert Wiesing (2005). Distinguishing two different aspects of what Mitchell calls "image," Wiesing differentiates those visual signs that we perceive in the outside world from those that we form in our imagination. The imaginary signs were suspect to Orthodox critics such as Stenjaev and Dukhanin, while Protestant instructors I encountered during my fieldwork actively encouraged exercises of imaginary visualization.

For example, during the Baptist video seminar on "Life Principles" discussed in chapter 3, a lesson on "The Means of Success" discussed the benefits of memorizing biblical passages and visualizing their scenes in the mind while reciting them aloud. It was through this meditative practice that the central "message of success and victory" of any passage of scripture became clear to the believer. One of the cumulative consequences of unconfessed sin was an inability to visualize scenes from scripture, a state which the devil took advantage of to draw a person into ever deeper sin.[14]

The recorded lecture demonstrates the saving power of visualization with the help of a little video animation: While expounding on the importance of imagining scenes from scripture, instructor Bill Gothard is shown making a chalk drawing of the "tree planted by streams of water" from the opening lines of Psalm 1. Once the drawing of trees in front of a radiant sunset is complete, the sunset gradually changes into the face of

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[14] Field notes, April 15, 2005.

Christ. This use of video animation to achieve an effect that would not have been possible in a live classroom resonates with Wiesing's observation that video and computer imagery recreate the features of mental imaginaries more closely than do traditional painting and photography (Wiesing 2005). Video and animated film share the capacity of the human imagination and dreams to visualize beings and objects that shift shapes and otherwise escape the laws of object constancy and gravity to which static pictures are more closely bound. As Birgit Meyer notes in her work on video production among Ghanaian Pentecostals, these technical possibilities make video a particularly suitable medium for reproducing the kinds of visions of divine and demonic powers which Pentecostal worship encourages (Meyer 2006).

The distinction between material and imaginary visual signs thus captures the variety of uses of images in Orthodox and Protestant traditions better than a simple division into iconodules and iconoclasts. Orthodox Christianity has developed an elaborate tradition of carefully regulated material visual signs, sometimes understood as tools to keep imaginary visual creations in check. Protestant pietism rejects material signs, but encourages the creation of imaginary ones as a spiritual practice.

Demonstrating the same enthusiasm for imaginary visualization, members of the Charismatic Christian Center sometimes described the end goal of their liturgical practices – involving dancing, clapping, and praying in tongues to the music of the band – as "seeing God face to face" (*videt' Boga litsom k litsu*). A song the congregation frequently sung at a stage of their liturgies known as "worship" or "adoration" (*poklonenie*) repeated over and over: "I want to touch you/I want to see your face/I want

to know you, Lord."[15] These words were meant to quite literally bring worshipers into a state of being able to carry out the actions described, as I discovered during one cell group discussion, where one member asked if the others wanted to come to the point of seeing God face to face, and the group leader answered, in a matter-of-fact way: "Of course, everyone wants that." Vision was not the end goal of these visualization practices, but the abolishment of all mediation through material signs certainly was. Earlier in the conversation, the leader herself had commented that the past Friday's all-night prayer vigil, led by a prayer leader from Moscow's Triumphant Zion, had brought her into the state of "not only looking" at, but "entering into the room" with God, and admitted it to be a weakness of her usual prayers that she seldom reached this point.[16]

Neither the Baptist nor the Charismatic practice is entirely a free play of the imagination. The ability to visualize verses depends on the believer's immersion in scripture and purity from sin, and the close-up vision of God's face is the last stage in a long succession of levels in collective or individual worship, which bring about a sense of the close presence of God that overcomes the mere distance of "looking at." Protestants saw icons as inadmissible external substitutes for such internal vision. Orthodox believers in Joshkar-Ola and Moscow to whom I mentioned Protestant visualization practices, in turn, spontaneously recalled that the church fathers warned against letting images arise in the mind during prayer, referring to the same tradition of polemics as Dukhanin. For members of each denomination, engaging visual images thus meant negotiating a fine line between strenuous spiritual discipline and misleading earthly shortcuts.

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[15] *Khochu kosnut'sja tebja/Khochu ja videt' tvoe litso/Khochu ja znat' tebja, Gospod'.* Tape of Friday evening service at the conference "Arise and shine," Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 9, 2005.
[16] Field notes, June 28, 2005.

Engaging the secular imagination

What is at stake in such debates is also the question of the place of secular visual media in religious learning, and both sides use the resources provided by their own theological tradition to answer it. Orthodox Christians who claimed that the church fathers were against imagining visual scenes during prayer were probably referring to the tradition of apophatic, noniconic prayer, a prayer focused on the invocation of the name of Jesus (with a formula such as "Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me") and directed toward cleansing the mind of all sensory impressions and thoughts other than remembrance of Christ. Though exhortations to strip the mind of images and concepts during prayer go back to fourth-century Egypt and Cappadocia, the practice of invoking the name of Jesus to achieve this "inner stillness" (Greek *hesychia*) was fully elaborated among the monks of the Greek hesychast movement of the tenth to thirteenth centuries. In nineteenth-century Russia, this monastic practice of the so-called "Jesus prayer" was popularized among laypeople through the translation of the *Philokalia* ("Love of goodness," Slavonic *Dobrotoljubie*), an eighteenth-century Greek compilation of works of the church fathers dealing mainly with the practice of the virtues and of prayer, published in Church Slavonic in 1793, in modern Russian in 1877. Lessons from the *Philokalia* inspired popular religious literature such as *The Way of the Pilgrim* (an anonymous manuscript set in the 1850s, first published in 1884), which describes laypeople practicing the Jesus prayer (Ware 1985: 399, 404-407; Florovsky 1991 [1937]: 175-177; French 1965 [1884]; see also Meyendorff 2001b).

Contemporary laypeople's suspicion of the dangers of imagistic prayer are probably sustained by this nineteenth-century rediscovery of older sources – Russian

nineteenth-century theology being, in its turn, one of the major sources of inspiration for

post-Soviet Orthodox publications (Stöckl 2007: 256-258). In the reprints of the

Philokalia for sale in many church kiosks, Orthodox believers find such lines as "Blessed

is the intellect (Greek *nous*, Russian *razum*) that is completely free from forms during

prayer. […] Blessed is the intellect that has acquired complete freedom from sensation

during prayer."[17] Like the contemporary theology of the icon, this fascination with the

rediscovery of hesychasm is a selective privileging of certain strands of spirituality,

eclipsing other traditions of inner prayer in the east, which include imaginative

meditation upon events from the life and passion of Jesus.[18]

Books like Dukhanin's draw on this partial version of Orthodox theological

tradition to construct a strict distinction between Christian liturgical forms and public

spectacles of secular modernity, such as cinema and television (Dobrosotskikh 2004;

Grachev 2003). Dukhanin's general critique of the portrayal of a suffering Christ in film

has thus a very different tenor than published western critiques of Mel Gibson's *Passion*,

which focus mainly on specific questions of content, such as the portrayal of the Jews in

the film or the effects of its extremely violent imagery (Burston and Denova 2005). As I

have already noted, Protestants in Joshkar-Ola have less scruples about using film and

other secular media for evangelizing purposes, and integrate them directly into their

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[17] Evagrios the Solitary (ca. 345-399 AD), On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts, §§ 117, 120, quoted from the English edition of the Philokalia (Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1979, vol. I: 68). Note that the "forms" from which the intellect is to free itself are shapes and concepts in the mind, not the linguistic form of the prayer text. As Kallistos Ware (1985: 403) points out, the Jesus prayer in the Christian East has usually consisted of a formula encompassing a whole sentence, contrary to the tradition of reciting the name, or names, of God in Sufism and some forms of western medieval mysticism. We will see later that insistence on the preservation of linguistic form is an important difference between Orthodox and Pentecostal ways of "spiritual" prayer.

[18] Ware (1985: 400) notes that Peter of Damascus (eleventh-twelfth centuries) discussed imageless prayer and imaginative meditation side by side, as mutually complementary modes of prayer, while the earlier Mark the Hermit (ca. fifth century) and the later Nicolas Cabasilas (fourteenth century Greece) also recommended visualizing meditation.

liturgy. If anything, they seem to consider the exchangeability and material

unassumingness of mechanically reproduced media as a safeguard against idolatry.

One of the most iconoclastic groups in Joshkar-Ola, the Christian Center, for

instance, kept a commercially produced city map of Joshkar-Ola, with the words "God

loves the city of Joshkar-Ola" glued across the top in hand-written letters (fig. 6.3). The

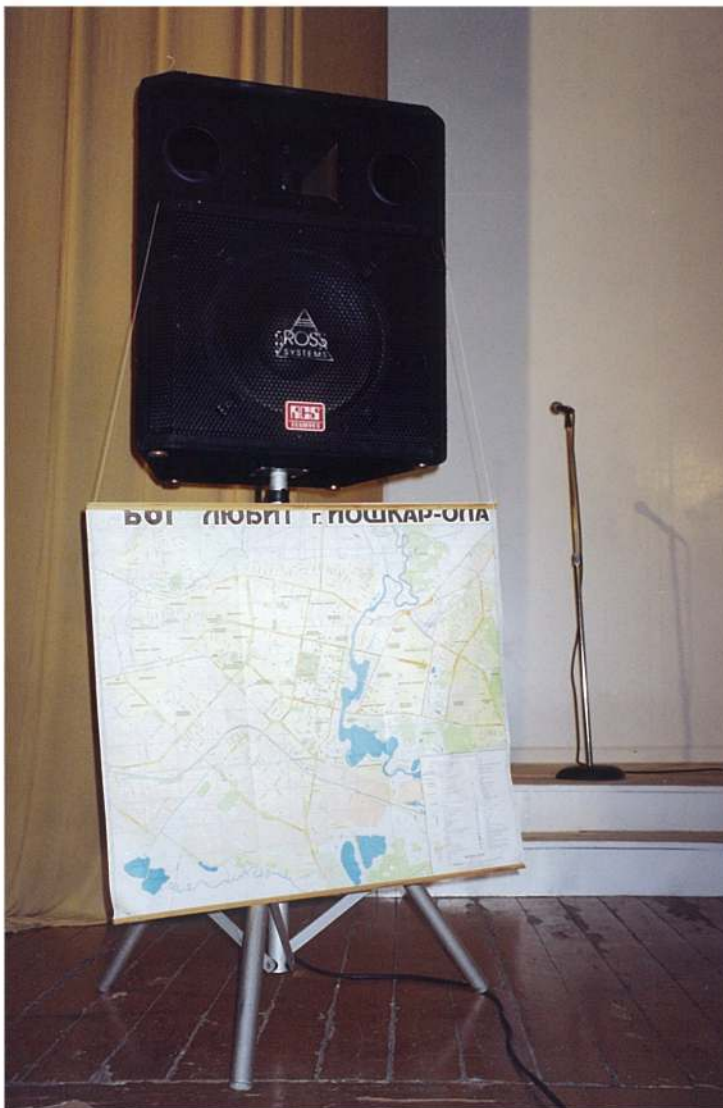map and the loudspeaker from which it hung were the only things the congregation took

Figure 6.3: City map used for prayer in the Christian Center, Joshkar-Ola. September
2005. The inscription across the top reads "God loves the city of Joshkar-Ola."

with it when renovations forced them to move their worship space from the auditorium to the lobby of the former cinema they had purchased. Thus serving as a marker of sacred space, the map was the centerpiece of "prayers for the city" towards the end of each Sunday service, when the members of the congregation stretched out their arms toward the map while a designated leader prayed for the evangelization of the city. Similar practices of praying over maps are used by evangelical groups in North America and elsewhere. The map is a medium to influence the spiritual world that permeates and surrounds the physical territory, and in which angels and demons battle over its future.[19]

For members of this church, what made this map acceptable as a liturgical object was that it was "simply bought in a store" (as they explained to me when I photographed it). Unlike Orthodox icons, it made no claim to significance either by virtue of its beauty, its age, or its miraculous history (Krasilin 1996), and hence did not relieve worshipers of the obligation to create a vision of God's majesty in their imaginations. Though not quite as extreme in their effort to minimize all use of material objects in worship as the Zimbabwean Pentecostals studied by Matthew Engelke (2005), the members of the Christian Center also seem to regard maximal simplicity and uniformity as a redeeming feature of those objects that they do find themselves constrained to use. If the simple white robes used by the Zimbabwean Masowe weChisano are an "anti-fashion" and the pebbles they use as prayer tokens may, by analogy, be called anti-objects (Engelke 2005: 127, 131), then the map in the Christian Center is an anti-icon.

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[19] Many websites provide "prayer maps" of the so-called "10-40 window" (the area between ten and forty degrees northern latitude that is home to some of the world's fastest-growing populations, many of whom belong to world religions other than Christianity). See for instance the "Strategic Towns Prayer Map" distributed by Global Mapping International, www.gmi.org/pttw4/pttw41.htm, accessed March 28, 2007. As another form of engaging in "spiritual warfare" (McAlister n.d.) over the city, this church was also conducting so-called "prayer patrols" through areas of the city it planned evangelize. In the evenings before all-night prayer vigils in the church, small groups of members would walk through the streets and courtyards quietly praying in tongues, a strategy geared toward decreasing the influence of demonic forces.

It may also be an anti-icon from an Orthodox point of view, since instead of being a conduit of divine grace toward the supplicant, the causal flow of influence in prayers over the map is from the image to the depicted reality. But there are also similarities between maps and icons. Both appear as trustworthy guides for a visual imagination of spiritual reality because of a particular stylized realism. Both genres are considered to offer faithful representations whose claims to resemblance to the prototype are made possible through conventions of stylization. Icon portraits represent the facial and bodily features of individual saints as they have been passed on in tradition, as well as containing conventionalized clues for the type of saint represented – for instance, martyrs hold a cross in their hand, monastics wear monastic robes. In a comparable process of stylization, a map-maker works off exact measurements of natural features and represents them with the help of conventions that selectively transmit those features that are considered essential information. As with Byzantine icons, these conventions include specific perspectival techniques for representing three-dimensional realities on a two-dimensional surface that avoid the illusion of three-dimensionality afforded by central perspective in realist painting. In the Peircean classification of signs, both the icon and the map thus combine aspects of "icon" and "symbol" (Peirce 1955: 102-103). What distinguishes maps from icons is their institutional context of production and the traditions that govern their specific conventions of stylization, and most crucially, the blessing that each icon must receive from a priest, whether it is hand-painted or mechanically produced.[20]

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[20] Icons sold in a church kiosk are typically blessed already. Icons painted locally or purchased from other sources can be brought to church for a short service of blessing (*osvjashchenie*) to be performed by a priest for a fee, using holy water and prescribed prayers (Sil'chenkov 2001: 209-210). In the same village of Shorun'zha where I encountered the empty icon corner, another family had a Marian icon painted by an

For the Charismatics, the secular context of production of the map and its lack of material distinction safeguard them from the charge of worshiping an image. Since it was "just bought in a store" and was designed for a different function than the one to which it is put during prayer, the map as physical image can be treated as a mere stimulus for mental images of spiritual battles. From the Orthodox point of view, to the contrary, the individual blessing that marks the icon as picture and material image is important to differentiate it from the secular images that threaten to dominate worshipers' imaginations.

Uses and perils of visual imaginaries

What emerges as a difference between Orthodox and Protestant uses of images is thus the question whether a material picture should stimulate the visual imagination to free association or limit and discipline the human capacity to create mental images. When applied to the question whether a devotee should contemplate Jesus' face on a wooden board or in the imagination, this debate seems of purely inner-Christian concern. From the point of view of the other religions present in the republic, there may be little difference between imaginary and material depictions of a divine face, since both anthropomorphize the divine.

"Jesus Christ is an image painted by someone," the chimarij high priest, Aleksandr Tanygin, told me in an interview. Although his reference to images as "painted" (*obraz, kem-to napisannyj*) suggested that he was thinking of material icons, he

acquaintance which, as they explained to me, was "not a real icon" because they had not taken it to the church to bless. This icon was placed in a curtained-off corner in the living room, while an old, presumably blessed icon occupied the analogous space over the dining table in the kitchen. This indicates that people who are not particularly devout are aware of the distinction between blessed and unblessed icons, but they do not necessarily take the trouble and expense of a blessing.

went on to talk about the ways the apostles had distorted Jesus' original teachings. From his perspective, material and metaphorical images were equally untrustworthy as a consequence of Christianity's doubtful source base, in contrast to the palpably present, living and growing sacred trees that formed the center of Mari worship.[21] Also pointing to a close connection between imaginary and physical anthropomorphic images, the mufti of Marij El used a Friday sermon to accuse a dissenting faction in the Muslim community of falling into Christian iconodulism. Labeling his critics as Wahhabi, the mufti accused them of asking: "It is written: 'Allah ascended on His throne.' How did he ascend? Where is the throne?" These Muslims, he said, forgot that "God has no beginning and no end, He was not born, He has no son and no father. They are already imagining an image (*predstavljajut obraz*), like Christians. The next thing they'll do is draw this image in the prayer niche."[22]

Both these critics treat imaginary and physical images of the divine as closely implicated with each other, and equate both with Christian anthropomorphizing. But the polemic in the mosque also indicates that the problem of visual imaginaries of spiritual realities is not limited to Christianity. To add an example from outside Russia, Charles Hirschkind discusses a style of contemporary Islamic preaching that is somewhat reminiscent of the verbal "icon painting" of Protestant preachers. Hirschkind emphasizes the popularity of the "word as camera" style on Egyptian sermon tapes, which heavily relies on visualizing description and on scenic and perspectival shifts reminiscent of cinema and television news reporting (Hirschkind 2006: 156-161). None of Hirschkind's examples of this style include verbal descriptions of divine persons, but he nonetheless

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[21] Interview notes, April 1, 2005.
[22] Field notes, December 30, 2005. On the practice of labeling dissenting factions in Russia's mosques as Wahhabi, see chapter 1, note 24.

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characterizes it as a significant departure from older traditions of Islamic oratory. He interprets it as an accommodation of the preachers to the new kind of "literacy" common among their audiences, shaped by television viewing more than by listening to scriptural recitation and interpretation. Considering the parallel to the Pentecostal sermon about Mel Gibson's film, the emergence of such styles may also indicate that traditions that are iconoclastic with regard to physical images are not necessarily as concerned about the spiritual effects of mental images.

Debates within Christianity about physical and mental images are thus part of a larger question of how religious practice can relate to a secular world saturated with images. In negotiating this relationship, interpreters of the Orthodox iconodule tradition are narrowing their understanding of icons, interpreting them as purely visual media with potentially didactic content. But they insist that the physical image is not a tool to stimulate mental imaginaries, as it is in Soviet theories of *nagljadnost'* and evangelical uses of images. Rather, in the Orthodox understanding, learning from contemplating an icon happens not by using images to comprehend abstract truths, but by placing oneself under the guidance of an exemplary person still assumed to exist as a soul within the body of the church.

In these subtle differences in uses of the visual, we see the capacity of different disciplines of self-transformation to criticize each other's practices and premises. One thing atheist activists and religious adepts have in common is that they take the cumulative effects of minute interactions very seriously, paying attention to distinctions that may not mean much to their less involved contemporaries. The divide between secular and religious ways of being is also among the distinctions to which committed

activists of all sides ascribe far more importance than most people. In the following

chapter, I trace the concerns of these activists with distinctions between secular spectacle

and religious worship.

Chapter 7

The soul and the spirit: Spectacle in liturgy

The previous chapter explored the potency ascribed to sight by religious and secularist activists. Although they favor different mechanisms of learning, all sides seek to use sight as a channel through which a person's inner development is open to outside influence. All of them also distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of sight – from the atheist point of view, Soviet visual aids increase knowledge and emotional engagement, whereas icons stupefy those who contemplate them. In Stenjaev's polemic, icons channel perception into contact with divine grace, whereas cinematic representations of sacred persons lead to idolatrous hallucinations. For evangelical Protestants, scriptural content can be transferred to visual media for the purpose of convincing outsiders or edifying believers, but no picture deserves sacred status based on its material qualities. The chimarij priest criticizes Christian images as untrustworthy products of human mediation and prefers immediately palpable sacred trees, whereas the mufti would reject both as inadmissible concretizations of the divine.

In these mutual judgments, the transformative powers of various senses – touch and hearing in addition to sight – come under scrutiny for their relative virtues and vices. Religious and secular transformative disciplines thus contain standards for distinguishing admissible and inadmissible uses of various kinds of sense perception, be it on oneself or

on other people. These standards, I suggest in this chapter, have implications for the ways in which different traditions draw the boundary between secular and religious settings. Liturgical worship and secular public gatherings are comparable from an outside perspective as occasions that involve the organization of bodies in space and the deployment of various senses in order to create a common experience, or as "a set of formal acts which deal with or refer to postulated matters about society or ideology" (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). But the degree to which they can be made commensurate under common headings such as "ritual" depends on standards of judgment whose sources are themselves historically situated (Asad 2003). The different ways in which committed atheist and religious activists in Russia have drawn such boundaries show their perceptions of the stakes of living secular or religious lives.

This chapter discusses practices of deploying, transforming, and orchestrating sense perceptions to mark a setting as secular or religious. Following the lead of historical and ethnographic studies of the values assigned to various senses in different theological and philosophical traditions (Bauman 1983; Hirschkind 2006; Jay 1993), I look at sites of disagreement about such values among the traditions present in the Mari republic. In particular, I look at degrees to which Soviet didactic uses of spectacle are seen as compatible with religious liturgies, or antithetical to them, and investigate liturgical theologies in which a contrast between ordinary and higher, transformed forms of perception maps onto a distinction between secular spectacle and religious worship.

For contrast's sake, the religious groups whose relationship to didactic spectacle I explore in this chapter are Orthodox Christianity and charismatic Pentecostalism. Although I have treated them as diametrically opposed in terms of their organizational

strategies and attitudes toward material objects in worship, both denominations share a view of liturgy as a means of experiencing doctrine, and a theory of the psyche where emotions are not seen as endpoints of human possibilities, but as possible stepping-stones towards another kind of faculty. This faculty is labeled "spirituality" (*dukhovnost'*) and associated with the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, underemphasized in the theology of other Christian denominations (Berzonsky 2004; Shaull and Cesar 2000: 145-159). Orthodox and Pentecostals differ radically, however, in their ideas about what practices will help people transcend emotion and achieve "spiritual" worship, and about the relationship of such proper practice to secular forms of teaching and spectacle.

The theological differences involved are longstanding and have a broad geographic history of development, and my argument is that it is necessary to take these differences into account, and see them as *theological*, in order to understand the mutual interactions of copresent religious and secular traditions in post-Soviet Marij El. While it may seem self-evident to say that there can be theologically motivated disagreements within and between religious groups over proper engagement with secular forms, the issue of intra-religious critique has rarely been explored in depth in anthropological studies of relationships between religious activists and "secularism" or "modernity." Typically, ethnographers focus on a single religious group, which they contrast to "secularists" or "liberal nationalists."[1] This chapter tries to take a deeper look both at

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[1] Below, in the section "Modern soulfulness," I discuss an example from Saba Mahmood's work on the Egyptian piety movement where she casts a potentially theologically motivated critique of this movement as unequivocally secularist. The same tendency is evident in Susan Harding's work on North American fundamentalist Christians and the challenges they present to ethnographic study, in which her persistent assumption is that these people are challenging precisely because anthropologists are an overwhelmingly secularist lot, unprepared to confront any group of people who take religion seriously and yet live in North American modernity (Harding 1991; see also Özyürek 2006). By contrast, Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere's (1988) study of changes in twentieth-century Sri Lankan Buddhism, on which I draw later in this chapter, presents an example of the insights that attention to intra-religious debates can yield.

differences within the religious camp and at the specifics of secularist ideas about emotion, spectacle, and worship, hoping to better understand the challenges that confront people as they move between religious and secular spheres.

Body, soul and spirit

Whereas Soviet-period literature operates with such terms as *ateizm* and *sekuljarizatsija*, which entered Russian from western languages,[2] Slavic vocabulary for gradations between godliness and wordliness assumes a common religious frame of reference. Similar to the etymology of the term "secular" in Latin Christendom (Casanova 1994: 14; Taylor 2007: 54-55), *mirskoe* in Russian can mean "in/of the world" without implying a total opposition to, or rejection of, religious faith. Rather, it refers to the worldly affairs that may dominate a person's life during certain times, receding into the background at others. Just as, in this understanding, some people can be more "secular" than others without being atheist, some religious groups can also be judged more bound to the affairs of the world than the devout Orthodox.[3] Instead of a binary divide between worldliness and godliness, people conversant in the Orthodox tradition often expressed these differences in a threefold division of physicality, soulfulness, and spirituality (*telesnost'*, *dushevnost'*, and *dukhovnost'*).

One of the most frequent judgments I heard and read among Orthodox Christians about western Christians in general, and Protestants in particular, was that their religion

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[2] For a useful overview of the social history of atheism and anticlericalism in pre-revolutionary Russia, see Husband 2000: 28-35.

[3] Or, from the point of view of various dissenting groups that sprang up in Russia from the seventeenth century onward, mainstream Orthodox may represent a "worldliness" that the truly devout must reject by observing more stringent disciplines of prayer, sexual abstinence, or restrictions in diet and commensality (Breyfogle 2005; Engelstein 1999; Panchenko 2004; Rogers 2004).

was indulgent towards immediate bodily and emotional needs, while Orthodoxy was harder to understand and initially difficult to accept, but ultimately allowed a practitioner to develop faculties which could not be learned anywhere else. Orthodox comments on Protestantism often focused on the lenience to bodily frailties of a faith that required no fasts and allowed worshipers to sit down in church, or on the sentimentality of Protestant music and the purely emotional bonds of good feeling that held Protestant congregations together. Two rural priests asked me if Lutherans practiced confession and communion or if they "only sing songs" during services (as, in their opinion, did Baptists and other "sectarian" groups known to them), and the mother of one of the priests asked if it was true that Protestants ate meat throughout all weeks, with no fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays. The association of Protestantism with a less demanding form of Christianity more conducive to pleasant sociability than spiritual growth was also made by a more sympathetic observer, a rather loosely practicing Orthodox woman who often visited the Lutheran church in Joshkar-Ola, and was friends with the pastor and his wife. I often heard her comment that she liked the feeling of that "comfortable, homey church" (*ujutnaja, domashnjaja tserkov'*). But she also commented that the Protestant teaching of salvation by faith alone struck her as "a childish faith," a desire for an instant joy of salvation that denied the responsibility to constantly work on oneself.

During the Protestant-Orthodox dispute in the Christian Center, Father Oleg Stenjaev presented a similar view of Protestant doctrine as not necessarily wrong, but representing a standstill at a low stage of spiritual insight. Stenjaev identified the core Protestant virtue of "faith" as merely the first step of a Christian life, to be followed by the development of the other two Christian virtues of hope and charity (*ljubov'* – love –

in Russian), with the utmost goal of not just gaining forgiveness of sin like a slave or a child, but achieving the "reconstruction of the image of God" in oneself.[4]

An identification of Protestantism with sensual indulgence may be surprising to western readers who associate Eastern Orthodoxy with lavishly decorated churches and beautiful music and Protestantism with strict austerity. But the ethnomusicologist Jeffers Engelhardt reports comparable judgments from Estonian Orthodox choir singers, many of whom converted from Lutheran backgrounds. These church musicians contrast the sentimental pleasure of Lutheran congregational singing to the more restrained, prayer-oriented styles of those Orthodox choirs striving for a return to what they term Byzantine musical traditions. In Orthodox singing they find a subordination of musical to verbal formulae and a discouragement of ostentatious displays of skill that brings worshipers "to the right level," as one of the Estonian interviewees puts it (Engelhardt 2005: 240). In Engelhardt's words, the pre-revolutionary *riimilaulud*, rhymed hymns written in metrical, strophic tunes, designed for easy congregational singing, are suspect to many post-Soviet Orthodox Estonians for their "sentimental, ecumenical, Protestant-influenced texts" and

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[4] Interdenominational dispute at the Christian Center, Joshkar-Ola, transcript of an audiorecording (without exact date, ca. 2003) provided by the Missionary Department, Orthodox Diocese of Joshkar-Ola and Marij El. The virtues of faith, hope, and charity are derived from 1 Corinthians 13, 13 and common to eastern and western branches of Christianity, as an addition to the four "cardinal virtues" of Greek philosophy: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (Pelikan 1993: 141). The view of virtue as the object of a lifelong struggle of gradual self-shaping is one of the features of Eastern Orthodox theology which anthropologists of Greece have found to resonate with lay self-understandings in this Orthodox country (Hirschon 1989; Stewart 1991). It also seems to correspond quite closely to the practices of shaping virtuous selves through repetitive bodily disciplines described by Talal Asad (1993) for medieval western Christianity and Saba Mahmood (2005) and Charles Hirschkind (2006) for the contemporary piety movement among Egyptian Muslims. It certainly contrasts with the instant transformation expected in evangelical conversion (see Robbins 2004 for an ethnographic exploration of the problems caused by this expectation of instant moral change), and also with the emphasis on quick malleability entailed in the Soviet concept of pedagogical method which I outlined in chapter 2 (also see below in this chapter). Whether a view of virtue as the outcome of long-term self-fashioning discipline stands in general contrast to western European enlightenment ethics, as Asad and Mahmood claim, is a broad question beyond the scope of this dissertation. As the preceding chapters should have demonstrated, the pedagogical constellation which I subsume under the heading of "Soviet didacticism" draws on a number of intellectual and practical traditions whose histories of productive tension would be lost if we subsumed them under an undifferentiated image of "the Enlightenment."

the "alienation from text" of the tunes, which disrupts the intense concentration on prayer which they associate with proper Orthodox worship (Engelhardt 2005: 207).

The contrasts drawn by these Orthodox practitioners are summed up in film critic Dukhanin's accusation, quoted in the previous chapter, that "the spiritual was […] replaced by the soulful" in western Christendom (Dukhanin 2005: 92). The polemical contrast between Protestant "soulfulness" (*dushevnost'*) and Orthodox "spirituality" (*dukhovnost'*) tells us something about Orthodox understandings of wrong and right foundations of worship and of the kind of community that worship should create. In colloquial Russian, the terms *dusha* and *dukh* have as much semantic overlap as their English counterparts "soul" and "spirit," but the adjectives derived from them have clearly distinct usages, where *dushevnyj* can connote both an emotionally rich, open sociability (*dushevnaja beseda* – a conversation "from soul to soul") and correspond to English derivatives of "psyche" (*dushevno bol'noj* – a mentally ill person, a psychiatric patient). *Dukhovnyj*, by contrast, has strong connotations of something connected to the church or organized religion (*dukhovnyj san* – the clerical rank; *dukhovnaja seminarija* – a theological seminary; *dukhovnaja muzyka* – religious music), but can also, and during late Soviet times often was, be used with secular, moralistic meanings (*dukhovnye tsennosti* – spiritual values).[5]

In Orthodox writings and sermons, *dusha* refers to the immortal human soul of Christian teachings, while *dukh* is sometimes used to refer both to a basic life-force which all living beings have from God and to higher faculties of moral and intellectual intuition with which only humans are endowed by virtue of their status as images of God

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[5] For an exploration of the rich semantics of the Russian word *dusha* (soul), see Pesmen 2000. Unfortunately, she pays only fleeting attention to *dukh* (spirit), only briefly mentioning its use in the rhetoric of Gorbachev, where she seems to treat it almost as a synonym of *dusha* (Pesmen 2000: 8).

(Luka 2006 [1978]) and that give energy and direction to the soul, but are not under its control (Lorgus 2004). Similar to everyday Russian usage, theology does not always unambiguously distinguish soul from spirit. But soulfulness has a more circumscribed meaning, connoting human persons and social groups in their fleshly, worldly nature. This usage goes back to distinctions between *psychē* (soul) and *pneuma* (spirit) made in the epistles of St. Paul (1 Thessalonians 5, 23; Hebrews 4, 12), which interpretations have linked to other distinctions he makes between the natural, fleshly existence of fallen humanity and the new, grace-filled life offered by Christ. Spirit/*pneuma*, in the words of a twentieth-century Russian theologian working in this tradition, is "the soul, beautified by grace" (Gumilevskij 2004 [1913]: 108).

Some of the Greek Church fathers elaborated the distinction between soul and spirit into a teaching about three modes of life – the carnal, psychic (or soulful), and spiritual. These are ascending steps toward realizing potentials that are innate in every human being, but must be developed through patient exercise. One of the nineteenth-century bishops who popularized the teaching in Russia wrote: "The human soul makes us little higher than the animals, but the spirit reveals us as little less than the Angels" (Feofan 1991: 33).[6] The teaching about the comparative wordliness of different ways of

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[6] As with the idea of emptying the mind of images during prayer, the *Philokalia* (see chapter 6) also seem to have played a role in popularizing the distinction between body, soul, and spirit in Russia. In this Greek collection, the eleventh-century Byzantine monk Nikitas Stithatos, following St. Isaac the Syrian, distinguishes the carnal, psychic, and spiritual modes of life as representing different stages of spiritual development. As the editors of the English translation point out, this is only one of several tripartite divisions of spiritual life occurring in the *Philokalia*, which include practice-contemplation of created essences-knowledge of God (Evagrios the Solitary, Maximos the Confessor), and purgative- illuminative-mystical (Pseudo-Dionysios Areopagitos; see Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware 1979-1995, vol. IV: 76-77, 107-108). None of these divisions seem to refer to exactly the same developmental process, and all of them speak primarily about monastic life. But the body-soul-spirit succession in particular was taken up by some nineteenth-century Russian theologians writing for a devout lay audience, such as Feofan the Recluse and Ignatij (Brjanchaninov). See A. I. Osipov 2001 for a discussion of the perceived need for nineteenth-century theologians to explain the teachings of the *Philokalia* in light of what was realistic for laypeople, or even contemporary monks, to achieve.

life provides a model for Orthodox judgments about other confessions as well as about secular culture.

In his lectures on pastoral theology held at the Spiritual Academy at Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery in Zagorsk near Moscow in 1947-48, Archimandrite Veniamin (Milov, 1887-1955, died Bishop of Saratov), uses the contrast between spirituality and soulfulness to differentiate between the Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant understandings of the priesthood. Having left the foundation of divine grace bestowed through the apostolic basis of sacraments and prayer, Catholic priests base their authority on merely human structures, while Protestants, revolting against this priestly authority, often replace it with an exalted faith in the capacity of individuals to save themselves, which sometimes leads to a deification of those people who become leaders by popular acclaim.

In Weberian terms, the archimandrite might have said that Catholicism suffers from an excess of the rationalized charisma of the office, Protestantism from an excess of the unregulated charisma of self-proclaimed leaders (Weber 1972 [1921]: 140, 144). But according to Veniamin's lecture, both are manifestations of churches held together by natural emotions rather than by spiritual bonds. The Catholic priest, representative of a church characterized by "sentimental-authorial dramatism," "excites the religious feelings of believers through external, natural means," equivalent to "the upbringing (*vospitatel'noe rukovodstvo*) of children not through conviction, but by means of tyrannical discipline (*vlastnoj distsipliny*)" (Veniamin 2002: 150-151). Among Protestants, having fallen into the other extreme, the denial of all externalities, leadership is "based not on inherited hierarchical grace, but came from the belief in the calling of

these people through the Holy Spirit and their immediate divine 'empowerment'." In the most extreme case, the "self-proclaimed hierarchy of the sectarians" (by whom Veniamin apparently means both Protestant-derived groups such as Baptists, Pentecostals, and Jehovah's Witnesses, and Orthodox-derived ones such as Molokans, Dukhobors and Skoptsy), "blind followers deify (*obozhestvljajut*) [their presbyters and elders] for sentimental excitement of the soul (*sentimental'noe dushevnoe vozbuzhdenie*) and religious morphinization (*morfinizatsiju*), although in reality these only weaken their genuine spiritual love for God" (Veniamin 2002: 153).

Among Orthodox priests the same danger of replacing a grace-inspired spiritual influence on others with natural, human, and soulful means existed, for instance when priests placed all their hope in fiery sermons (155) or into measures of "religious-moral enlightenment" of the laity (158). Ways of fighting the "temptation of soulfulness" (155) lay in humbling oneself before God and "remembering the true power of only the grace-filled (*blagougodnykh*) ways of influencing the believers," i.e. through the sacraments (Veniamin 2002: 156).

At first glance, Veniamin's emphasis on liturgy and personal asceticism rather than public sermons and educational or charitable initiatives seems very much in line with the requirements which the Communist Party made of the Orthodox Church as a price for the end of the worst physical persecutions after World War II. His critique seems directed against reform efforts in the church in the decades before the revolution, when priests like Ioann of Kronstadt (1829-1908) attracted large followings with an emphasis on sermons and initiatives for charity and popular enlightenment, and afterwards, when Archpriest Aleksandr Vvedenskij (1889-1946) led the "renovationist"

movement in the church which promoted shortened liturgies in the Russian language and

used the new-style, Gregorian calendar introduced by the Bolshevists (Freeze 1995;

Kizenko 2000; Mitrofanov 2002; Shkvarovskij 1999). Though it enjoyed a short period

of government support in the early 1920s, this movement was condemned in the Soviet

Union after the Moscow Patriarchate acknowledged the legitimacy of Soviet rule.[7]

Delivered just a few years after the Theological Academy's reopening as one of three

institutions of Russian Orthodox higher learning in the Soviet Union, Veniamin's lectures

can be read as an example of political conformism in Orthodox theology under Soviet

rule.

But Veniamin can also be read as emphasizing the radical difference of the kind

of community created by the Orthodox church from the community created by the public

events of Soviet life. For instance, he reminds his students of the antipathy of such famed

preachers of the Byzantine church as St. John Chrysostom against applause in the

churches, "suitable only for secular spectacles" (Veniamin 2004: 154), and of the fight of

the Apostle Paul in Corinth against the "soulful-fleshly party-mindedness of the local

Christians" (148). By applying the Leninist term "party-mindedness" (*partijnost'*) to the

divisions among first-century Christians in Corinth, he gives this Soviet virtue a negative

twist and suggests that it implies the same kind of "soulful" attachment to human leaders

which he later imputes to Protestants, and which he calls "equal in effect to the service of

idols and demons (*ravnosil'no idolosluzheniju i besosluzheniju*)" (148).

The distinction between soulfulness and spirituality in Veniamin's work seems to

hinge on the role of the sacraments and of an asceticism focused on canonically

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[7] Veniamin quotes the works of Ioann of Kronstadt approvingly, but criticizes some of his followers, the "Ioannite" sect (Veniamin 2004: 145; on the Ioannites, see Kizenko 2000: 199-201).

prescribed prayers. Reliance on these means, instituted by the tradition of the church, assures priests that they are not relying on their own capacities to influence people. This view of church canons as guarantors of "spirituality" can also apply to the distinction between icons and secular images discussed in the previous chapter. Icons are set apart by the formal conventions which govern their painting and by the blessing of the church, and hence exempt from the risk of idolatry that occurs when secular imagery occupies a devotee's mind during prayer. When Oleg Stenjaev talked about the protection icons offer from uncontrolled imaginaries, he did not use the term "soulfulness" for the latter, but the related "sensuality" (*chuvstvennost'*, from *chuvstvo* – feeling), a term that also occurs in Dukhanin's discussion of the harmful habits of seeing encouraged by western religious art (Dukhanin 2005: 88). A common feature of the spiritual in the thought of Dukhanin, Veniamin, and Stenjaev is thus that it offers protection from the influence of illegitimate authority. Conversely, the range of targets to which charges of soulfulness or sensuality are applied reflects the range of forms such influence can take, in secular as well as religious settings.

Modern soulfulness

One thing that the charge of "soulfulness" accomplishes within Orthodox discourse is to deny secular forms newness or uniqueness by placing them into a single framework with the practices of other confessions and with phenomena of popular Orthodoxy. All of these phenomena fall under a single diagnosis of false authority. During my fieldwork I heard the term "soulfulness" used by clergy and educated laypeople in internal critiques of other Orthodox Christians, where it came to denote something like "superstition." In a

paper entitled "On faith and superstition" at a conference sponsored by the Mari Diocese in honor of the "Days of Slavic Literacy," celebrated across Russia in memory of Saints Cyrill and Methodius, a priest from a district center elicited vivid interest from fellow priests in the audience when he discussed "paganism in the church." This paganism, he said, occurred "when spirituality is replaced by soulfulness (*kogda dukhovnost' podmenjaetsja dushevnostju*)."

Examples of such "soulfulness" included an exaggerated importance ascribed to the outward shape of ritual actions (when people believe that a candle passed through a crowded church to be lit before an icon should be passed only over the right shoulder), as well as immediate instrumental effects ascribed to payments made to the church (when a wealthy man drives up to the church, buys the biggest candles, asks others to place them, and leaves "as if God owes him"). The presenter also included exaggerated emotional displays in church not backed up by reflection under the same category of soulfulness, as when a young woman stands with tears in her eyes during the prayers preceding confession, but has nothing to say when it comes her turn to confess. All this, in Father Vjacheslav Mikhajlov's words, meant that "people come to consume (*potrebljat'*) grace, but leave nothing in exchange," and constituted "a pagan attitude toward the sacraments," to be remedied by explaining to people these sacraments' "true spiritual meaning."[8]

Such anxieties over folk interpretations of the sacraments and blessed objects are well familiar from the history of the Catholic church and from Protestant-Catholic polemics (e.g. Thomas 1971), and have often been taken as a sign for affinities, or mutually reinforcing developments, between reforming trends in European Christianity

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[8] Vjacheslav Mikhajlov, O vere i sueverii. Paper presented at the 8th annual conference "Christian enlightenment and Russian culture," Joshkar-Ola, May 26, 2005. Quotations are from notes which I took during the presentation.

and the development of secular modernity. Anthropologists and historians of religion

have pointed out the intertwining of Reformation-era theology, colonial missions, and

theories of religion in philosophy and the emerging social sciences around concerns about

distinctions between religion and magic, spirit and matter, immaterial meanings and ritual

objects or actions (Keane 2007; Kohl 2003; Masuzawa 2000). Scholars focusing on

western Christendom often see little difference between Christian reformist and secularist

critiques of "superstition," "magic," or "fetishism," and indeed see these Christian

reformers as a major force that gave shape and momentum to processes of secularization

(Taylor 2007).

The concerns of Orthodox priests with having their faithful distinguish between a

candle and its meaning as outward expression of an inner state of prayer could well be

read as part of a comparable reforming, modernizing thrust. But the range of phenomena

labeled "soulful" indicates that the thrust of the critique is not primarily toward the

disenchantment of the material world. By subsuming under one label phenomena of

popular religious practice and secularist Soviet culture, the critique of soulfulness

identifies secularity as not primarily a matter of disenchantment, but of worldly

attachment.

For example, note that Father Vjacheslav subsumes both instrumental ritualism

(the assumption that the shoulder over which a candle is passed affects the efficacy of the

prayer of the person who sent it on its way) and excessive, unreflective display of

emotions – as when women weep before confession – under the category of

"soulfulness." This might fit in with an interpretation of his critique as modernist,

directed toward shaping a self-mastering, intellectualized subject that is in control of

body and emotions. Saba Mahmood, for instance, interprets middle class Egyptian

Muslims' critiques of women in the piety movement who weep during prayer as

necessarily based on assumptions about "a detachment between the inner life of a self and

its outward expressions" (Mahmood 2005: 146), assumptions she associates with Kantian

ethics, the European Enlightenment, and "liberal-nationalist thought" (Mahmood 2005:

132).

At other places in her book, Mahmood suggests, but does not discuss, sources

within Islamic theology for debates about the appropriateness of weeping during prayer.[9]

Likewise, Father Vjacheslav's suspicion of emotional display without reflective

contrition need not draw on ideals of modern self-control, but rather on the monastic

ideal of a lucid, peaceful state of mind – the "inner stillness" valued by the Byzantine

hesychasts. It has, of course, long been argued that such monastic ideals, brought into

inner-worldly life through the Protestant reformation, are themselves a source of the ideal

type of the modern, self-contained individual (Dumont 1983; Taylor 2007). But Richard

Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere suggest a more complicated story in their study of

what they call "post-Protestant" Sri Lankan Buddhism. They argue that over the

twentieth century, Buddhist monastic ideals of calmness and serenity have come under

pressure from a greater emphasis on emotional expression and emotional attachment

(either to a god or to a teacher) as more laypeople have become involved in meditation

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[9] For instance, Mahmood reports that the didactic materials used by women in the piety movement
distinguish between different motivations for weeping during prayer, and condemn the practice when it is
done to impress other Muslims, or without the intention of pleasing God (Mahmood 2005: 130). While
generally arguing that this movement represents ethical views and standards of piety that are completely
different from those of the European Enlightenment, she does not ask if the middle-class critics of weeping
may be making similar distinctions as the women Mahmood is working with. Instead, she associates the
middle class views with an idea of human agency that privileges interiority and sees exteriority as a
secondary expression of a primary inner state, which she associates with Plato, Kant, the Enlightenment,
and ultimately with secularism.

and strive to practice monastic precepts in a Protestant-inspired, inner-worldly religiosity (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 29, 452-453). In this interpretation, the *breaking down* of theological reservations against public display of emotion would be a "modern" phenomenon, and the monastic disciplines on which the theological reservations were based have a far more remote relationship to modern rationality than is often assumed.[10]

Part of what seems to concern Father Vjacheslav is not so much that young women are crying, but that their subsequent silence at confession indicates that they attribute cleansing power to these tears, rather than to the sacrament of confession and absolution. This would explain his conclusion that the problem lies in a wrong understanding of the sacraments. The point of explaining "the spiritual meaning" of the sacraments is thus not necessarily disenchanting them as purely symbolic actions, but, to the contrary, underlining the necessity of the proper actions being carried out with proper objects by properly ordained priests and properly focused participants before divine grace can take effect.[11]

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[10] Another example of a dynamic that looks comparable to the one described by Gombrich and Obeyesekere comes from a different study of the Egyptian piety movement, where Charles Hirschkind quotes an Egyptian preacher who thinks that weeping in mosques during sermons has increased as a result of the highly emotional styles of cassette sermons, but that people are merely weeping to feel cleansed ("like Christians at baptism") rather than linking emotional responses to virtuous action (Hirschkind 2006: 90). This indicates that some Egyptian Muslims sense an increase of displays of emotion connected to the religiosity encouraged by modern forms of mass media, and draw on distinctions within Islamic theology to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate emotion.

[11] Compare Vera Shevzov's discussion of the idea of "self-willed" behavior (*samovol'nost'* , *samochinstvo*) in nineteenth-century Russian Orthodoxy, i.e. acting without seeking the blessing and instruction of properly instituted churched authorities, as a measure for the limits of permissibility far more important than doctrinal arguments (Shevzov 2004: 123-125). During my fieldwork I also found that priests would allow a great deal of variation in laypeople's and clergy's behavior, as long as that behavior could be interpreted as expressing reverence, love and obedience toward the church and its institutions, such as the sacraments. A woman who appears to come to church in order to experience strong emotions rather than seeking absolution from a priest would fall under the charge of "self-will" as well as under the danger of *prelest'*, a term from the writings in the *Philokalia* denoting a state of self-deception in which a person engaging in spiritual exercises without proper guidance interprets hallucinations produced by emotional excitement or demonic temptation as visions from God (A. I. Osipov 2001).

Part of the efforts of priests are thus directed toward getting their parishioners to understand the sacraments and other prescribed church rituals as materially necessary guarantors of a spirituality that goes beyond emotional exaltation. This clarifies why Father Vjacheslav can level the charge of soulfulness against instrumental uses of candles, while authors such as Archimandrite Veniamin's and Dukhanin's apply it against such "modern" forms as Protestant prayer meetings and secular film and theater. From the point of view of the Orthodox distinction between spirituality and soulfulness, the gatherings of radical Protestant groups, devoid of sacramental piety and serving no other purpose than to praise God through song and prayer and listen to instruction, are "soulful" because what draws people together is their attachment to each other and to the pastor, instead of the presence of Christ in consecrated bread and wine and the action of the Holy Spirit. These Orthodox critics would thus agree that there is an affinity between Protestantism and secular modernity. But in their diagnosis this affinity does not lie in issues of rationality and disenchantment, but rather in particular ways of managing public emotion (cf. Reddy 2001). They see both Protestantism and secularity as "spectacular" not in Guy Debord's (1992 [1967]) sense of visible consumption covering up the hidden realities of production, but in a sense perhaps closer to Max Horkheimer's and Theodor Adorno's critique of the culture industry: the prevalence of spectacle creates optimal conditions for humans to influence each other (Horkheimer and Adorno 1969 [1947]).

As I argued in the previous chapter, such critical perspectives on perception and persuasion may have gained urgency through the experience of Soviet secularity. But by assimilating Protestant prayer meetings and secular spectacles to the ritualistic beliefs of rural churchgoers and pre-Christian Greek and Slavic paganisms, the Orthodox critique

of soulfulness places modernity and secularism in a far deeper time frame. The label of the soulful thus offers a way to think of the secular as less the product of a particular age than a set of conditions that emerge when humans associate with each other without divine participation. At the same time, the monastic ideals that furnish the standard for spiritual life are the product of a particular history. It is thus instructive to compare the markers of secularity and spirituality in Orthodoxy with those of a Christian denomination of very different historical origins, but equally concerned with enlisting the help of the spirit to reach beyond human emotion in worship.

The Pentecostal Spirit and its place in liturgy

Orthodoxy is not the only Christian denomination to have a teaching of the relationship of the soul to the spirit and to consider the presence of the Holy Spirit as a defining feature that sets apart an ecclesial from a secular gathering. Orthodox teachings on spirituality and soulfulness go back to statements in the epistles of St. Paul that are part of the sacred scriptures for all Christians. Those denominations that observe the yearly cycle of feast days celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost as a moment of departure in church history. German Lutheran liturgies start with an invocation of the Holy Spirit, and Quakers value silence to ensure that the few utterances made during worship have a properly spiritual source (Bauman 1983). Everywhere, ecclesiastic institutions claim to be mediators of divine presence.

But a particular commonality exists between Orthodoxy and a denomination that is otherwise among the most distant from it in terms of its soteriology, social ethos, and ecclesiology – Pentecostalism. The commonality lies in the fact that both Pentecostalism

and Eastern Orthodoxy have produced teachings on what liturgy must be like in order to be spirit-filled. While other denominations tend to take for granted that the Holy Spirit will be present wherever people gather in the name of Christ, both Eastern Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism identify particular liturgical conditions for such a presence. In both groups, teachings about the difference between secular and religious gatherings thus involve a commitment to orthopraxis that is commonly noted for Orthodox churches, but has often been overlooked in discussions of Pentecostals that focus on the alleged individualism of their beliefs and spontaneity of their worship.[12]

Although the Pentecostals I met in Joshkar-Ola did not use the term "soulful," they also thought of spiritual life as lying beyond the limitations of ordinary human capacities. Pentecostal worship, both in its more traditional forms (going back to the early twentieth century) and its more recent Charismatic adaptations, is geared toward enabling members of the congregation to receive and exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Without these gifts they will go to heaven after death if they have accepted Christ as their Savior, but lack the capacity to fulfill the plan which God has for them in this life, which is to serve others and facilitate the coming of God's kingdom. When I asked a member of the Christian Center in Joshkar-Ola to explain the power, or strength[13] of the Holy Spirit, she explained it to me in terms of the dissatisfaction she started to feel a few years after

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[12] Coleman (2000) and Robbins (2004: 256-257) give insightful descriptions of the repetitive structure behind the apparent spontaneity of services in Pentecostal or Charismatic churches, but do not go into any great detail on individual liturgical elements and their intended or unintended effects. Luhrmann (2004) recognizes the crucial role of liturgical actions for sustaining members' commitment to Charismatic-type mega-churches, but sees their effect largely in triggering individual imaginative processes.

[13] In this and previous conversations, she used the Russian word *sila*, which translates both as "strength" and "power" in English. Throughout this chapter, I translate *sila* as "strength" to distinguish it from *vlast'* (power, authority, used both in an institutional sense, as in *sovetskaja vlast'*, Soviet power, and in terms of control over others, such as *vlast' diavola*, the power of the devil). Choosing "strength" rather than "power" also emphasizes the seemingly mundane nature of many of the tasks for which Pentecostals rely on this gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Shaull and Cesar 65-71).

having joined a Baptist church, which offered no access to spiritual gifts. Using a

comparison of the recently born-again to infants that is common among evangelicals, she

identified her need to receive the baptism of the holy spirit and leave the Baptist church

with the need for a kind of strength that she did not naturally have:

> In the Bible it says that we should grow and go on from infants into the full age of
> Christ. We must always grow, grow, grow. If at first you guard and guard
> children, if there are scissors lying around, a needle, you say don't take it, don't
> touch, and then they grow a bit and they should already not touch it on their own.
> They have already learned something and should do it on their own. And the Lord
> also wants us to walk by ourselves, that is, to search for him now. Then he was
> leading us, I went there, and he went there, I went here, and he went here, like a
> mother who walks and walks behind her little one, and then comes a point [where
> she says] how much walking around can one do, where is he going now, and the
> Lord is like that also, it's necessary for us to walk on our own and look for him
> now. And then, one could say, there came the necessity for strength. Then you
> walked about, and now you feel the difference, feel that that isn't it anymore. That
> is, you grew up to a different age. The will is a bit older. And now you know and
> understand that you have to witness and speak. And even to make sense of the
> Word (*chtoby dazhe Slovo razbirat'*), even there you need God's help. In
> everything this strength is necessary.[14]

In explaining what was specifically "spiritual" about this strength and how it differed

from physical sustenance, she used the analogy of the all-pervasive energy of light:

> After all, if the Lord, God Almighty, gave birth to us, then we need nourishment,
> food for the body, well bread, things to chew on, they are necessary for our
> physical strength, so that we might walk, carry out something in faith. But then
> we also need that *strength*, spiritual strength is necessary, spiritual. Of course
> there is spiritual strength not from God, it also exists, for evil deeds, for all that.
> For that I don't even have to try very hard. But in order for the word of God to be
> fulfilled, to be accepted, for that word of God to dissolve in us, to grow, to
> multiply, even in order for a plant to grow, strength is necessary, it receives this
> strength either through the sun, heat has an impact, or through moisture, rain. And
> as we say, this moisture, rain, that is physical, and heat, the light, it has no direct
> contact to this plant, it is general light, for everything living, everything growing,
> this energy of the sun, the light, it also gives strength to this plant to grow and

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[14] Taped interview, May 27, 2005.

then to bear fruit. Without this strength, nothing can grow. And in the same way in order to grow and serve God, serve the Lord, divine strength is necessary.[15]

In this view of the life of the believer as a process of growth that goes beyond the moment of being saved, there is a certain parallel to Orthodox teachings of the lifelong acquisition of Christian virtues. But a crucial difference lies in the fact that for Pentecostals this development starts *after* certainty of salvation is gained, while for the Orthodox it is what "gaining salvation" consists of. Orthodox laypeople are encouraged to see the motivation for service in the cleansing and salvation of their own soul, not in a divine mission to witness to the world. For instance, in a school for Orthodox sisters of mercy run by the Mari Diocese, the instructors repeatedly mentioned that the work of caring for the sick that the women in the class would engage in was "for the salvation of the soul" (*dlja spasenija dushi*, meaning the soul of the sister, not of the patient). While they were also told that they should take care of the spiritual as well as the physical needs of the patient, that meant trying to incline the patient to participate in morning and evening prayers or to accept the visit of a priest for confession and communion, not using one's own life story to persuade the patient of Christian truths, as in evangelical witnessing.

We have seen in the discussion of Archimandrite Veniamin's pastoral theology that for him the sacraments, instituted by the Church in its capacity as the domain of the worldly presence of the Holy Spirit after the ascension of Christ (Florovsky 2003 [1963]; Meerson 1988), are among the means to make the service of a priest spiritual, rather than soulful. The same sacraments appear as mediators in the mission of the sisters of mercy,

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[15] Ibid.

enabling the sisters to exercise the virtue of humility (*smirenie*) and allow the Holy Spirit to work on the patient, rather than exerting their own human influence.

Pentecostals and Charismatics seek a far more immediate relationship to spiritual power, seeking to embody it themselves through speaking of tongues. What would seem like soulful emotional exaltation from the Orthodox point of view is deemed spiritual because of the external, unexpected, and uncontrolled nature of the gifts obtained through this form of prayer. At a time of dire need, during her ten-year-old son's mortal illness, the woman I quoted above gained the strength she had been yearning for after she prayed to be baptized by the Holy Spirit and learned to speak in tongues through the teachings and prayers of two American women visitors. After this baptism of the Spirit, she was able to understand the reasons for people's actions, the meaning of the words written in the Bible, and also to find comforting words for her son as he was in pain from leukemia. In answer to his question if he was suffering for sin, she told him that he was suffering because God was preparing him to be a great preacher, like an eighteenth-century Protestant minister they had read about. This gave him visible joy in spite of his pain. On the grounds that the words she said had so much more effect than she would have expected her own explanations to have, she attributed them to the new strength she had received:

> These words, they carried this divine spirit, this strength in these words. If there had been no strength, I would have said ordinary words, and there wouldn't have been this divine strength, I would just have put knowledge into them and would not have given him joy, would not have given him to see the love God has for him. In this situation I on my own would not have thought of this and would not have dared to say such a thing. I would never have dared say such a thing to my own child. Well, how would I say something like that and he would feel better. Really this just came and came (*prosto poshlo i poshlo*), I don't even know how it came and came out of me just like that (*kak eto poshlo i vykhodilo iz menja prosto*

tak). I wasn't even thinking any of that. I wasn't thinking, but whatever came out of the heart, I said. And afterwards, he wasn't thinking anymore why he was in such pain.[16]

This woman's account presents the process of gaining spiritual strength as a very personal experience, such that what appears to her as outside inspiration might be interpreted as springing from some half-acknowledged part of her own self. Thus, Tanya Luhrmann explains born-again Christians' feelings of personal communication with God as their discovery, through redirected attention and new concentration practices, of the fragmentary, multivocal nature of all ordinary self-experience (Luhrmann 2004: 524). But solitary introspection is not the only way in which spiritual strength is experienced and diagnosed.[17] We have already seen (cf. chapter 2) that the church which this woman eventually joined, the Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, had very specific teachings on the need for collective learning and discipline as a condition for the church to achieve its purpose. This is the point where teachings about the strength of the Holy Spirit intersect with teachings about liturgy.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Nor does it seem sufficient to see the source of new-found strength in the achievement of narrative coherence, although another narrative about a dead son well known in ethnographic literature about evangelicals takes this approach: Susan Harding's account of her interview with a Baptist minister, who used the story of how he accidentally killed his teenage son and came to accept this incident as God's will as the clinching device in a long narrative about sacrifice, the completion of which would have been Harding's own acceptance of Jesus's sacrifice for her sins (Harding 1987, 2000: 56-57). Like that Baptist minister, the woman I interviewed was hoping to convince her interviewer of something, in our case the necessity of baptism by the Holy Spirit – since she knew me as a Lutheran, she assumed that the step of accepting Jesus as savior already lay behind me. She also offered me a resolution at the end of our conversation: if God gave me the desire to know about something, she said, I should not shut my heart to this desire, because God knew what I would someday need that knowledge for. But the point of her search for spiritual strength was not to find an explanation of her son's death or to accept it, but to be able to perform the right actions that would give him comfort in dying and sustain her in life beyond his death. Interpreting her aim as primarily one of bringing a narrative to completion would ignore the concern with bringing about a match between messages of faith and palpable changes in the world that pervades the teachings and liturgical practices of her denomination.

That the importance of liturgy among Charismatics was in some way comparable to Orthodox understandings was brought home to me when I noticed the great lengths to which the young pastor and his Moscow mentors were going in order to teach the congregation proper ways of praising God through music and dance (*proslavlenie*). Having heard frequent exhortations during services to dance harder and follow the lead of the band more enthusiastically, I began to ask church musicians about the significance of this practice of praise. The bandleader of the Christian Center, a woman in her late twenties, started to answer my question by identifying ways of praising God as a central issue in interdenominational discussions:

> Differences between denominations come most of all because of praise (*iz-za proslavlenija*). Remember in the gospel according to John the fourth chapter, where Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman. She asks him a variety of questions – oh, I see that you are a prophet, this and that. But in the end, it all comes down to the question of how to worship (*kak poklonjat'sja*). And he says, you [pl.] don't know what you worship (*chemu klanjaetes'*), but we know. From here comes even the name of some confessions, that is, denominations. Ortho-Dox (*Pravo-slavnye*). Those who praise in the right way (*Pravil'no slavjat*).[18]

Indeed, the Russian term for Orthodoxy, *pravoslavie*, takes up the aspect of the Greek term which refers to "right praise" rather than "right doctrine," and the eastern churches have traditionally maintained that there is a unity between "doctrine and doxology," *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*, meaning that doctrinal truths become part of lived experience through liturgy (Felmy 1984; Schmemann 1966 [1961]). For a Protestant denomination, by contrast, the Charismatic insistence on the centrality of questions of "how to worship" is rather unusual. A Russia-born Lutheran pastor, whom I interviewed in his capacity of director of the Lutheran Hour in Moscow, a mission operating through radio and

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[18] Taped interview, December 21, 2005.

television, used the same story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman to make a point about the insignificance of questions of ritual, in answer to my question about differences between urban and rural missionary work:

> In the villages there is greater influence of course from the Orthodox Church, and also most people know about Baptists, about the Baptist tradition. That among Baptists there are no icons, but these others have icons. But of course the level of real knowledge of God among people is very low. You can compare it to the gospel of John in the fourth chapter, when Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman at the well. He talks to her about very spiritual things, very high ones, and she tells him what she knows. Yes, yes, yes, I remember, we are told that we have to worship (*poklonjat'sja*) on Mount Garizim. He talks to her about very spiritual things, and she talks to him about what she knows. When we talk to such people from villages, they usually say to us: yes, we have icons at home too, yes, me too, I have holy water standing at home. You have to start from such very elementary things, gradually going on to somewhat deeper things.[19]

The gospel story both are referring to is in John 4, 7-30, where Jesus rests near a well outside a Samaritan city and asks a woman for water. After a conversation in which he announces to her that he will provide living water which will forever quench the thirst of all who drink it (10-15) and correctly describes her marital history (16-18), she calls him a prophet. Then she comes to the question of right worship, and the different teachings of Samaritans and Jews in this respect:

> [The woman said,] "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4, 20-24)

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[19] Taped interview, September 5, 2005.

The Charismatic bandleader and the Lutheran pastor offered very different interpretations of this passage. While the Lutheran interpreted the woman's question about the proper place and way of worship as an expression of her ignorance of true spiritual issues, the bandleader stressed that knowing how to praise God is what "everything comes down to." In the study materials for musicians she designed, she quotes the above passage to say that leading the congregation in worshiping God "in spirit and truth" is the purpose of the praise-and-worship band.[20]

Spiritual motion

For Pentecostals as well as Orthodox Christians, worshiping "in spirit and truth" involves specific bodily gestures. In the Russian Synodal Bible translation, all the instances of "worship" and "worshiper" in the English Revised Standard Version correspond to terms like *poklonjat'sja, poklonnik* etc., literally meaning "to bow down," "one who bows down." Pentecostal and Orthodox liturgy translate these terms into quite different gestures and rhythms, but preserve their bodily connotations.

In the excerpt from my interview with the bandleader quoted above, terms related to "worship" (*poklonenie*) appear together with those denoting "praise" (*proslavlenie*). The link between the two has long been present in Jewish and Christian liturgical texts, for instance in the practice of blessing food offerings through giving thanks for them and praising God's deeds over them (Felmy 1984: 196; Lang 1997: 29), or in the language of the psalms, which treat public praise as the proper response to experiences of divine power (Assmann 2002: 166-170; Bornkamm 1968). Orthodox services stand in this

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[20] Course 3: Life and spirit of praise. Materials written and provided by the leader of the praise-and-worship band, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center.

tradition when they treat "praise" as a proper way of accomplishing "worship." The

vespers, for instance, start with a call to worship followed by a psalm of praise. The priest

or a reader calls:

> Come, let us worship God, our King.
> Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, our King and God.
> Come, let us worship and fall down before the very Christ, our King and our God.
> Come, let us worship and fall down before Him.[21]

In response, the choir or a reader chants verses from Psalm 104,[22] "Bless the Lord, my

soul," which praises God for the works of creation. While praise is thus conceived of as a

verbal way of worshiping through prayers and hymnody, worship is also executed bodily

through acts of bowing down – for instance, when the gates of the iconostasis are opened,

or during the gospel reading. In response to the prayer petitions read by a deacon or

reader, people cross themselves and then either bow down from the waist (*pojasnyj*

poklon) or kneel and touch their head to the ground (*zemnoj poklon*), depending on their

personal piety and the liturgical season – prostrations to the ground are a penitential

practice more common during periods of fasting, and omitted during Easter week.

Pentecostal theologians are also fond of pointing out the many meanings of

"praise" in Biblical Hebrew and Greek (Munroe 2000). In the interpretation popular at

the Christian Center during my fieldwork, praise and worship formed a sequence, and

each had its own associated musical and bodily forms of expression. "Praise" (*khvala* or

proslavlenie), calling the presence of God into the church with loud, fast music and

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[21] In Slavonic: *Priidite, poklonimsja Tsarevi nashemu Bogu/Priidite, poklonimsja i pripadem Khristu, Tsarevi nashemu Bogu/Priidite, poklonimsja i pripadem Samomu Khristu, Tsarevi i Bogu nashemu/Priidite, poklonimsja i pripadem Emu* (Vsenoshchnoe bdenie 2001: 15).
[22] Psalm 103 in the Russian Synodal Bible translation, which follows the numbering of the Classical Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint).

dancing, preceded "worship" (*poklonenie*), a state of contemplative surrender to God by each worshiper, often expressed by people standing with both arms raised and face turned slightly upward, eyes closed and body slightly swaying, sometimes singing softly or praying in tongues. The culmination was the "entry into the holiest of holies" (*vkhod v svjatoe svjatykh*), the close physical contact with God that was the goal of each service, but was not always reached. To my knowledge, this last stage had no physical signs, but looked and sounded much like "worship." But I sometimes heard people discuss after a service whether or not they felt they "got through" (*probralis'*).

Both Orthodox and Pentecostals look to the Old Testament for instructions for correct, spirit-filled worship, but draw diametrically opposed conclusions, most of all when it comes to the proper role of material things in worship. During the debate in the Christian Center, representatives of the Orthodox church defend the use of icons with reference to the images of cherubim which decorated the arc of the covenant and the walls of Solomon's temple, in spite of the commandment against the making of images (Exodus 25: 18-22; 2 Chronicles 3: 7, 10).[23] Passages describing Solomon's temple were also popular at the Christian Center, whose leaders interpreted them as saying that the presence of God during worship was hindered rather than enhanced by the beauty of earthly things. At the beginning of the first service during the Christian Center's anniversary conference in September 2005, the male lead singer of the praise-and-worship band explained the necessity for enthusiastic praise with an example from the second book of Chronicles:

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[23] Transcript of the discussion provided by the Missionary Department, Mari Diocese, Russian Orthodox Church. The *Anti-sectarian Notebook* uses the same argument (Rubskij 2003: 20).

You know, the Holy Spirit reminded me of a passage in the Bible. It's the second chapter, em, Second Chronicles, the fifth chapter. We won't read the whole chapter, but in this chapter it is written that when Solomon built the temple, it was marvelous. There was so much gold there, there were so many stones, there was so much of everything that just looking at it one could, well, I don't know, trip over and fall, that's how beautiful and marvelous everything was. But you know, in order for people to really experience something, for them to start seeing something unusual, something was still lacking. It was very beautiful, there was gold, there were stones, everything. But you know, in this temple, God wasn't there yet. Everything was beautiful, everything was there, except for this. And you know, friends, I feel as if we're in that temple. Well, perhaps we didn't take as much trouble as with the temple which Solomon built, but everything here is in a festive mood. And now we need God, yes? And here it is written that they were standing there, and then they began to sing, to blow horns, [reads from the Bible] "and they were as one, trumpeters and singers and raised one voice in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord; and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, 'For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever,' the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."[24] There was a lot of gold, but *something* was missing [laughter in congregation], although everything was just great. But then came the glory of God. Let us now seek this glory, let us now seek God. Let us in this praise, in this glorification (*v etoj khvale, v etom proslavlenii*), let us stand up now, let us pray, so that God, so that he may be found by us. [Sounds of rustling chairs as people get up; electric organ starts to play quiet music.]
The Bible says that God *can* be found, the Bible says that we must search for him as long as he can be found. You know that now God can be found, now God can be found. Who believes in that, say Amen [congregation: Amen!] – halleluiah.[25]

Part of the reason for the different conclusions drawn from descriptions of the same

temple was that Pentecostals and Orthodox were reading biblical texts through the lens of

different musical practices. In both denominations, music is materially important for the

practice of worship, but it is used to create very different dynamics. In Orthodox

churches, only acapella singing is permitted, and Byzantine and old Russian choral works

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[24] 2 Chronicles 5, 13-14. I have modified the translation of the beginning of verse 13, up to the semicolon, to be closer to the Russian version. The quote within these verses ("for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever") is from Psalm 106, 1.
[25] Tape of opening service of conference "Arise and shine," Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 9, 2005.

have variable meters that adapt the rhythm of the melody to the rhythm of the text. In interviews with an Orthodox priest and former choir singer and two conductors of Orthodox church choirs, I was told again and again that the purpose of church singing was to support the priest and the congregation in "praying." In the words of one choir conductor, prayerful concentration depended on a singing that did not "attract attention to itself," but was uniform in style and tonality, and enabled listeners to pay attention to the liturgical texts.[26] Western-influenced choral works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, said the priest, "attract attention by their musicality" and were therefore fit only for concerts, not for worship. "Prayer and esthetic sentiment – spirituality and soulfulness – are after all somewhat different things." In explaining what he portrayed as a widespread return to harmonizations based on the Byzantine system of "eight tones" (Greek *oktoēchos*, Slavonic *os'miglasie*, a system of melodic phrases that succeeded each other through the weeks of the church year), he expressed the difference between a worship service and a concert in the vocabulary of spirituality and soulfulness.[27]

In the Christian Center, music was provided by a band with synthesizer, drum, and electric guitar, and its strong rhythmicality and variability was crucial to leading the congregation on the progression from praise to worship. During the opening service of the anniversary conference, the band leader's exhortation about searching for God was followed by a lengthy appeal to be joyful on the backdrop of calm music, after which the band broke into a fast-paced song. As usual during services, the music became calmer

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[26] Taped interview, September 18, 2008.
[27] Taped interview, September 12, 2008. The Estonian Orthodox choir members interviewed by Jeffers Engelhardt also formed part of choirs that aimed for a "Byzantification" of Orthodox choral singing, rejecting works which they perceived to be influenced by western conventions. In their interviews, they praised the "ascetic" character of Orthodox choral singing, a term which included the way in which melody was subordinate to the text of prayers and performance relied on the human voice without accompanying instruments, different from the strongly metered songs and use of organs and other instruments in Protestant churches and secular music (Engelhardt 2005: 255).

after two or three fast-paced songs involving clapping of hands and jumping. During the "worship" stage, slow, meditative songs (repeating lines such as "I want to touch you/I want to see your face" or "We are thirsting for you, Lord") overlapped with scripture readings and prayers led by the pastor.

This point was usually the first time in the service when people started praying in tongues, forming the backdrop to the pastor's prayer, which usually alternated between Russian and tongues. Sometimes the entire phase of *proslavlenie i poklonenie* could go on for well over an hour before the start of the sermon. Sometimes it continued after the sermon, sometimes the pastor asked members of the congregation to come forward with specific pledges or testimonies. Generally the pace of the service slowed down toward the end, with an altar call for newcomers who wanted to commit themselves to Christ, a collection of money, prayers for the evangelization of the city, and announcements.

Different from the steady degree of unperturbed concentration that is the ideal of Orthodox worship, Charismatic musicians aim for contrasts between moods of extreme excitation and relaxing calm. They achieve this through alternating pace, rhythm, volume, and harmonies in a technique reminiscent of a disk jockey who allows dancers to switch between moments of faster and calmer movement. Indeed, many observers of Pentecostal or faith-theology inspired churches have little to say about praise music except that it is rock music with Christian texts.[28] Tanya Luhrmann remarks on the inward-turning effect of singing "songs *to* God, not *about* God" (Luhrmann 2004: 523), and with that makes an important observation about the intimate nature of many of the texts. But at least according to the teachings which the Christian Center was receiving

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[28] This may in part be due to these churches' own doctrine that everything that happens during a service is spontaneously led by the Holy Spirit. On the possibility of identifying structure within the apparent spontaneity of Pentecostal worship, see Robbins 2004: 256-257.

through Triumphant Zion and the Embassy of God at the time of my fieldwork, such an inward focusing of "emotional attention," as Luhrmann puts it (ibid.), was not the point of these lengthy and often physically exhausting exercises. Neither was it to attract rock music fans to Jesus. Rather than esthetic or emotional, music according to the charismatic ideal was "spiritual," in the sense that it was to help both individual members and the collective transcend the bounds of natural emotions. But different from Orthodox understandings, spirituality was not a state of calm concentration, but a powerful presence that could only be evoked through personal sacrifice.

Music and sacrifice

In our interview, the bandleader emphasized discipline both within the band and in the congregation as a condition for effective praise. As leader of the praise band, it was her job to pass on the "vision" of the pastor to the musicians as well as make sure that the band prepared the congregation to receive the words of the sermon.

> Music, after all, is spiritual in and of itself. And praise contains spiritual preparation for a person's heart. Depending on how much praise there is, what the praise is like, its quality, that's how open the heart of the person will be to accept the word.[29]

For achieving this spiritual state, it was important that people not just be present during praise, but actively participate in its bodily activities, particularly those they found painful or embarrassing:

> The one who offers the sacrifice of praise (*zhertvu khvaly*), it says in the psalms, that person honors Me. That means God doesn't need simply – ah, why do we lay ourselves open like that, sometimes you have to shout, because you simply don't

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[29] Taped interview, December 21, 2005.

know what else to do. So that it'll be a sacrifice. So that there'll be a sacrifice, and a sacrifice is something you don't want to do. Something that is uncomfortable for yourself. Many people think that I am like that in real life. No! [laughs] No, I am a very quiet person. I know what is a sacrifice for me, and I know on what sacrifice God will come. On that which I want to do least of all.[30]

In some ways, this sacrifice of praise is a very individual affair, which each person must carry out according to his or her particular fears and discomforts, and spontaneously:

And I know that for every person sacrifice is something else. For some people it's a sacrifice to get clean pants dirty and get down on your knees. For him it's normal to jump, clap, everything is great, it's no sacrifice for him. He will do all that, but if he were to ask deeply, in the spirit, God, what is a sacrifice for you, God will say: get down on your knees. Oh, what a pity! But if he doesn't do it, *now*, when God says so, tomorrow God won't need it. You can't tell God, during praise (*vo vremja khvaly*) you can't say, God, let me shout to you tomorrow, when no one will hear. Or let me get on my knees before you tomorrow, when no one sees it. Let me do it later. When God prompts (*pobuzhdaet*) you to do something, you have to do it right then, or else it's no longer a sacrifice.[31]

One purpose of the public framework of congregational praise is thus to make the sacrifice greater, forcing people to struggle with their usual inhibitions. She later said that she advised people who had difficulty engaging in expressive acts of praise in public to start performing them in private, during their individual prayers, and experience how "God will come on these acts" then. This would then make it easier to do it in public. But public praise was necessary not just for the individual's sake, but for the sake of the whole church, and this made it not just an optional exercise of personal piety, but a requirement for each member of the congregation. Successful praise brought on the presence of God, as illustrated in the interpretation of the story of Solomon's temple.

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

When there was a strong presence, it could heal people, bring them to repent, and help everyone correctly understand the sermon.

For this reason, the bandleader was unforgiving toward people who said that they disliked the music of a church, but liked "the word," i.e. the sermon. "I am not even sure if they correctly understand the word. Do they hear what is said, do they understand it correctly?" During a break in my recording, she mentioned that she found it equally unacceptable for people to just stand still with raised arms during the entire period of praise, saying "I am at the stage of worship (*u menja poklonenie idet*), and everyone else is still at praise (*khvala*)." Stillness and raised arms were appropriate for the slow, advanced stage of worship, but one had to observe the order of "entering the courtyard – praise – worship in the holiest of holies." It was like the order of body-soul-spirit, she explained, taking up the same Pauline distinction that was so important in Orthodox teachings.[32]

At the Christian Center, worshiping "in the spirit" thus entailed going beyond one's own inhibitions and disregarding emotions such as comfort, shame, embarrassment, or fear. According to the congregation's mentors at Triumphant Zion, it was the task of people in authority within the church to encourage others to go beyond emotional comforts. The leader of the band of Triumphant Zion, the Ukrainian junior pastor whom I interviewed in Moscow, had visited Joshkar-Ola the previous year. He confirmed that the

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[32] Interview notes, December 21, 2005. Readers will note that the three stages she identifies differ from those I give earlier in this section, when I wrote about praise, worship, and entry into the holiest of holies. The terminology in which the congregation discussed their worship was quite fluid, but I make the latter distinction because I more often heard people discuss different stages of intensity in "worship" (acknowledging that they did not always make it into the "holiest of holies") than different stages of intensity of "praise," which the bandleader seems to express by distinguishing a preparatory phase of "entering the courtyard."

Christian Center needed more "character" in its praise, and that this was linked to a basic problem of authority prevalent in Russian churches:

> They have a very good heart. There. Which is thirsting for God. They have a very good heart, which loves God. There. What they lack – their character is not trained (*nevospitan kharakter*). Not the character of the people, but the general character, the collective character of the praise group. It is obvious that the praise group had no vision, and this failed to form a defined character (*chetkij kharakter*). For that reason, how should I say. I think that this is the basic problem. When there is a change in leadership. When these problems exist, a lack of vision, and the vision is always with the leader, a constant change in leadership. From that follows a constant change or lack of vision; this does not form the character of the ministry. From that follows an insufficient number of ministers, an insufficient number of musicians, insufficiency and again insufficiency and again insufficiency. This is only because the spiritual goal (*dukhovnaja tsel'*) was lost at some point.[33]

A spiritual goal, when it existed, enabled people to go beyond the natural goodness of their heart and form an effective group that can meet defined ministry goals. The idea that relentless and consistent music and dancing was both a sign and a precondition for an effective church organization manifested itself in preachers verbally berating the congregation to be more outgoing. Musicians sometimes spoke privately to members of the congregation who were not jumping, dancing and clapping actively enough. As the bandleader told me, she and her musicians would offer such reticent members a pact, saying: "Don't close your eyes, look at me and I will look at you, and we will dance together."[34]

These demanding teachings about praise met with mixed reactions within the congregation – some ignored them, some found them challenging and helpful for

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[33] Taped interview, December 8, 2005.
[34] Interview notes, December 21, 2005.

concentrating on prayer.[35] Individually, then, the liturgical creation of divine presence

could be experienced very differently and sought for different reasons. But it always

involved a tearing-loose from ordinary, habitual experience, and it was this act of

overcoming attachments and emotions that seemed the marker of "spirituality" for

members of the church. Achieved through musical and bodily practices of self-sacrifice,

"spiritual" worship means connecting the ideal of intimate spontaneity in relations with

God to the value of collective discipline in a corporate body that can obtain "victory" (a

key term in this as well as other Charismatic churches) over the forces of evil that beset

the world.

As with the prayers over the map described in the previous chapter, the ultimate

purpose of musical sacrifices of one's own inhibitions is participating in struggles in the

spiritual realms in order to claim a city from the spiritual forces of evil (MacAlister n.d.;

Wagner 1993). During the evening service in which the pastor scolded the congregation

"why aren't you dancing?," he went on to talk about the necessity of "pumping your

spirit" (*kachat' dukh*, as one would say about muscles in body-building) in order for God

to entrust the church with the great things for which he had chosen them. "God sees us as

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[35] When I told a long-time member, who had stayed through all the changes in leadership since the founding of the church under the Texan missionary, about my interview with the bandleader, she said that it was not always the level of noise or bodily intensity of participation that mattered. During the Christmas service (on January 8, Orthodox Christmas Day), for instance, no one had jumped any more than usually, but there had been a very strong, palpable "presence of the Holy Spirit" (Field notes, January 9, 2006). By contrast, when I paid a return visit to the woman from whose interview about the strength of the Holy Spirit I quoted earlier in this chapter, I asked her why the pastor had scolded them so much for not participating enthusiastically enough during an evening service the previous night. She insisted that he had not "scolded," but "taught." She then explained that she needed to shout loudly during praise in order to chase away the thoughts that would otherwise "attack" her: that at home the children were hungry (she had two surviving daughters, one a college student, one starting elementary school), her husband was angry (he remained a Baptist and was not completely happy with her choice of religious affiliation), she would accomplish nothing anyway, the laundry wasn't done. She needed the worship leaders to remind her to chase away those thoughts and concentrate on God, otherwise she couldn't enter into the holiest of holies. Once she was there, it was enough to be quiet, worshiping with arms raised in God's presence (Field notes, October 6, 2005).

people who solve the problems of the state," was the message that summarized the ultimate purpose of divine election and spiritual fitness.[36] In this idea of spirituality as a perpetual, aggressive struggle, the point of the similarity between praise music and secular rock may be to conquer of the prominent sites of secular culture through incorporation. The Orthodox idea of spirit, by contrast, demands a much greater distance to secular cultural forms, in visual art (see chapter 6) as well as in music.

The qualities of spirit: a comparison

There might be a question of the relevance or representativeness of the aspirations of a small cluster of churches within the broad Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. It is hard to tell from existing literature how widely the teachings of Triumphant Zion or the Christian Center regarding connections between praise, spirit, discipline, authority, and effectiveness are shared across the world.[37] What interests me here is to show, through comparison to Russian Orthodox teachings, the relevance of theology to defining the relationship between religious practices and secular forms. The qualities that make images or music "spiritual" are quite different in each case, indicating a different relationship of liturgy to secular gatherings and secular spectacle.

In the previous chapter, I showed that icons and prayer maps share a particular blend of realism and stylization, which makes them appropriate vehicles for contact with spiritual realms. Both are considered to be a faithful representation of a prototype, whose

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[36] Tape of service, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, October 5, 2005.

[37] The band leader of the Christian Center recalled in our interview that what she was hearing now from the musicians at Triumphant Zion resonated with the teachings of an American pastor and praise musician who had accompanied Pastor Robert in the early years of the church, indicating a wider international circulation of these teachings. For the constellation of teachings about praise, power, and changes in the world developed in the Embassy of God and its affiliate churches, an important influence seems to be Myles Munroe (Munroe 2000), a U.S.-trained Jamaican preacher, who has made several visits to Kiev, and whose books have appeared in Russian translation in the Embassy's Kievan publishing house, Fares.

accuracy is partly assured through resemblance to that prototype's physical shape, partly through adherence to symbolic conventions familiar to viewers. A crucial difference between the two is that the icon has an acknowledged existence and history as a material object. Rites of blessing, age, the number of people who have prayed before it, the miracles it has effected, the beauty of its craftsmanship, all add to its spiritual qualities (Krasilin 1996; Shevzov 2004). The map, by contrast, was a possible candidate for a ritual object in a church that passionately denied the need for such objects because, being mass-produced for secular purposes out of ephemeral, cheap material, it lacked material qualities that might have been recognized or discussed as significant.

The comparison between icon and prayer map shows that very different qualities can mark the distinction between something "soulful" and something "spiritual," although a common denominator seems to be some modification that makes an object, depiction, or action different from what are considered to be its "natural" characteristics. When it comes to music, beauty is again a quality that is considered conducive to spirituality in Orthodoxy, but detracting from it according to the teachings of the Christian Center. During a cell group meeting led by the bandleader, she discussed a former church member who had moved to Moscow, but had difficulty accepting Triumphant Zion because she found it "too loud." Her husband was Orthodox, and she had also attended Orthodox churches, "there she filled her ears (*naslyshalas'*), they have harmony, ideal sound, while in Triumphant Zion there is noise, shouting." As a consequence of her attachment to beautiful sound, this woman was unable to "graft herself unto the grace" of a spiritually strong church.[38]

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[38] Field notes, December 20, 2005. Judging from the services I attended at Triumphant Zion during archival work in Moscow, the musical style of the praise group there can be characterized as hard rock, and the

Orthodox Christians I spoke to often mentioned the musical beauty of services as one of the things that attracted them to church, and as marker of a state of spiritual grace that should be immediately palpable to anyone who attended an Orthodox service.[39] The choir conductor I quoted above said that this feeling of "grace" depended not on melodic beauty alone, but was created when singers and readers were praying while singing:

> [And people say:] grace filled the church. This is because that person [the reader] himself was praying, or the choir was praying, and this immediately spread (*peredalos'*) to everyone. It spreads to the priest in the altar, and his prayer also spreads, because the priest is already praying himself, and when the choir sings, it must help him in his prayer.[40]

To assist in the transmission of grace, music had to be beautiful, but unobtrusive. When recommending a CD recorded by the monks' choir of Valaam Monastery (a leading force in post-Soviet efforts to return to Byzantine-Slavic choral traditions), the saleswoman of an Orthodox bookstore explained that their music did not "put pressure" on the listener (*ne davit*), as some other music did, "even Orthodox music sometimes."

For some commentators, the link between musical formulae and the spiritual content of prayers is so strong that the system of eight tones is said to both resemble and enable the "circular movement of the soul" characteristic of angels (Martynov 1997: 78). Like prayer texts and canons for icon painting, the tones are thought of as a repository of the accumulated experience of spiritually more advanced generations, and their beauty is

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singers there frequently used shouting and discordant sounds on percussion and electric guitar. The style of the praise group in Joshkar-Ola was calmer, more like mainstream pop or rock, with occasional "folksy" tunes in a style that the members of the band considered to be "Jewish."
[39] A priest and a layperson expressed surprise how I could have attended services and not have turned Orthodox, or at least developed an intuitive understanding of what Orthodoxy was about (Field notes, May 11, 2005; July 2, 2005).
[40] Taped interview, September 18, 2008. Another choir conductor whom I interviewed put a similar idea into a succinct formula: "When the conductor isn't praying, the choir doesn't pray, when the choir isn't praying, the congregation doesn't pray" (Interview notes, September 14, 2008).

inseparable from their spiritual power. In the theology of the Greek Church fathers, explained the Orthodox priest in our interview on liturgical singing, people singing in the church were likened to the angels themselves.[41]

Underlying these different judgments about beauty may be divergent ideas about the moral status of earthly things. While there are ascetic disciplines in Orthodox monasteries in the interest of reaching the ideal of calm lucidity, there has also been a traditional skepticism against excessive self-mortification, which might be destructive of such calm and deny the participation of the body in the divine plan of salvation (Goltz 1979). As commentators on Orthodoxy often point out, Orthodox cosmology does not consider human nature to be inherently evil, but to bear the image of God, capable of being recovered through acts of will toward good. This also means that some natural impulses, for instance the impulse toward beauty, can provide a basis for spiritual growth if brought into the right form.[42]

For Charismatics, ideas that humans can be like angels and humanly created beauty can help us approach heavenly beauty diminish the indescribable, humanly unimaginable power of God. That said, Charismatic musicians are just as interested in "right" praise as their Orthodox counterparts. But both the bandleader in Joshkar-Ola and the junior pastor in Triumphant Zion answered my question if a particular style of music was needed to meet their ideal of a "praise group with character" by reiterating the common Protestant position that any style of music was acceptable, if performed for the glory of God. From their biblical sources, they can derive no musical sounds, only lists of the array of bodily movements and postures that are mentioned as pleasing to God, so

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[41] Taped interview, September 12, 2008.
[42] On the ethical significance of beauty for the Cappadocian church fathers, see Pelikan 1993: 286.

their teachings about right praise specify the sounds and movements that must accompany praise music, but not the music itself.[43] In practice, Charismatic churches I visited in Russia all used the rhythms of pop or rock music.[44] They obviously needed strongly rhythmic music to create the desired effect of a liturgical setting from which human intentionality was purged as far as possible.

With different degrees of reluctance, then, both denominations come up against what Webb Keane calls "the inescapable materiality that semiotic form introduces into even the most transcendentalizing projects" (Keane 2007: 41). For both, the passage from the "soulful" to the "spiritual" involves some operations of transformation and defamiliarization of ordinary objects, actions, and speech. As the summary in fig. 7.1 shows, the qualities that count as markers of the spiritual are very different. The initial opposition between routine and spontaneity provides a guide to the rest of the list, pointing to the way in which Orthodox understandings of spirituality assign a positive potential to pre-existing materials, be they traditional texts, aesthetic standards, material objects, or natural inclinations of the soul. In the Charismatic understanding, pre-existing objects and traditions can only take on a negative role, restraining the spirit from authentic movement. Even biblical texts must be continuously actualized as personal

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[43] The instructional materials prepared by the bandleader for the congregation of the Christian Center list ten "types of praise" (*vidy khvaly*), complete with biblical references. These are 1) singing (*penie*), 2) shouting (*vosklitsanie*), 3) expressing one's joy to God (*vyrazhenie radosti Bogu*), 4) thanks (*blagodarenie*), 5) standing before God (*stojat' pered Bogom*), 6) bending one's knees (*preklonenie kolen*), 7) waving the hands (*rukopleskanie*), 8) dances (*tantsy*), 9) extending your hands towards God (*prostirat', podnimat' ruki k Bogu*), and 10) singing in the spirit, i.e. in tongues (*penie v dukhe – na jazykakh*).

[44] While melodic style may really be variable, a North American scholar of liturgical music also identifies praise-and-worship music with a strong rhythmic quality and cyclical structure, facilitating prolonged repetition and easy memorability of texts or refrains, which allows congregations to sing along while not distracting attention away from physical and emotional responses to the music (Hawn 2003: 233, n. 21). In a discussion of the role of music in West African spirit possession, ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann (1982) argues against the assertion that a particular musical rhythm or speed physiologically causes trance, but notes the importance of the overall rhythmic structure of a ceremony, which, quite similar to that of services at the Christian Center, alternates between slower and faster tempi, with an overall acceleration in the course of the ceremony.

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│  Figure 7.1: Markers of spirituality in Orthodox and Charismatic worship. │
│                                                                           │
│  Orthodox                            Charismatic                          │
│  Routine                             Spontaneity                          │
│  Restraint                           Exaltation                           │
│  Humility                            Demonstrative strength               │
│  Guidance from tradition             Guidance from prophetic vision       │
│  Words from prayer book/liturgy      Speaking in tongues or in            │
│                                      spontaneously inspired words         │
│  Beauty, formality                   Disregard of form, overcoming of     │
│                                      desire for form                      │
│  Materiality transformed through ritual and   Materiality minimized       │
│  aesthetic convention                                                     │
│                          Collective participation                         │
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"revelations," rather than approached through the interpretations of previous generations. The second pair of terms, "restraint" and "exaltation," denotes the different approaches to ethical transformations: slowly refashioning existing dispositions within oneself on the Orthodox side, and quickly wiping out and replacing everything old among Charismatics.

A feature shared by both sides is that of "collective participation," i.e. a distinction between active participation in worship and passive spectatorship. For both sides, spectacle is an opposing foil on whose forms they partly depend, but from which they seek to distinguish themselves. The charismatic bandleader's disdain for people who passively stand through a service and the general value placed on expressive spontaneity can be read as signs of the late-twentieth-century evangelical movement's emergence out of the same countercultural moment in the sixties that popularized leftist critiques of consumption and the culture industry (Erzen 2006; Sandler 2006). When the Orthodox priest juxtaposes a worship service and a concert, this may conceal a comparable dependence on secular cultural forms. Indeed, the fourth-century Cappadocian fathers already contrasted the church as a place of real occurrences with the mere "acting out" of roles in Greek drama, all the while adopting theatrical vocabulary to talk about Christian

liturgy (Pelikan 1993: 23, 309). At the same time, Orthodox liturgical theology insists

that participants in worship are not *spectators* of a representation of long-ago events, but

participants in an actualized reoccurrence of events of biblical or church history.

The difference in Orthodox and Pentecostal understandings of participation again

lies in the different values of expressive spontaneity and routine. As the interview with

the bandleader has shown, the value of spontaneous, spirit-led expression among

Charismatics is achieved with the help of quite rigid expectations for behavior. On the

Orthodox side, participation means most of all that an individual faithful should observe

the calendar of the church year and try not to miss important feast days. "We must be

participants, because in church events are not remembered, but occur (*sovershajutsja*),"

said the Archbishop of Marij El during a Bible study session, to emphasize the need to

come to church regularly and participate in communal prayers, not to recommend that the

service should include any spontaneous expressions of laypeople.[45] From the Orthodox

perspective, then, spending the evening of Maundy Thursday (liturgically, the morning of

Good Friday)[46] watching a film about the passion of Christ is to miss the participatory

opportunity afforded by a four-hour service consisting of readings of the combined

passion accounts from all the gospels, followed by a veneration of the cross.

Given that both sides assume that becoming "spiritual" is the outcome of a

process of human transformation, we may also understand the differences as well as the

common critique of passive spectatorhood as expressions of each side's divergent ideals

of the kind of learning that should occur in a group setting. As Elin Diamond (1997: v)

has pointed out, all learning requires mimetic representation, something that critics of

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[45] Field notes, April 14, 2005.
[46] Orthodox liturgical days start at sundown, following Jewish tradition.

mimesis and spectacle have had to contend with since antiquity. For the Orthodox, the

danger of group dynamics lies in the fact that people may claim to represent a role that

they have not earned either through sacramental grace (as a priest who represents Christ

in forgiving sins or dispensing blessings, Dukhanin 2005: 110; Felmy 1984: 222), or

through a long process of becoming like a saintly model through devotion and emulation.

A fifty-year-old woman I met in Joshkar-Ola, who had left her position as theater director

to work for the diocese as one of a few full-time sisters of mercy, denounced the theater

as role play, "a game on stage and a game in life," but at the same time emphatically

championed the idea of praying not in one's own words, but with prayers composed by

the holy fathers.[47] Devotees like her might seek to emulate a saint through meditating on

his or her life and praying before his or her icon, and see this as quite a different thing

than impersonating the saint as an actor.

For Charismatics, spiritual learning progresses through personal decisions (often,

as the interview with the bandleader shows, "sacrificial" ones that go against short-term

wishes or comfort zones) in response to challenges from the holy spirit, heard either from

within or through a church leader in authority. For this reason, the whole function of a

service is close to that of a Soviet didactic event in the sense that it brings across

challenging messages to those in attendance, and tries to get them to respond by making

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[47] Interview notes, May 24, 2005. In this woman's view, what made church tradition effective was the
saintliness of its authors, by virtue of which their works provided the double benefit of being pleasant to
God and securing the intercession of the authors. She explained that it was possible to pray in one's own
words, but that God may not hear such a prayer, or rather, she corrected herself, take a long time to
respond. If we prayed to God's saints (*ugodnikam Bozh'im*, literally, those who have found favor with God)
who were standing at God's altar, then they prayed to God for us, which made the prayer reach God more
quickly. Besides, the prayers written by the holy fathers were inspired by the Holy Spirit (Interview notes,
May 24, 2005). If her explanation blurred the distinction between prayer *to* the saints and prayer *in words
written by* saints (many prayers in the Orthodox prayer book are ascribed to a particular Byzantine or
Russian church father), the reason may be that these are two possibilities for adopting the voice of someone
closer to God rather than "praying in one's own words," and both possibilities depend on the living link to
saintly persons that is maintained through church tradition.

life-changing decisions. In the interest of achieving this end, any means is acceptable, be it a film showing, a band, or a skit performed on stage. In Joshkar-Ola, most evangelical congregations were using former secular stages for worship, be they a former cinema, as with the Christian Center, or a rented auditorium in a culture club, as with Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses. As shown by the remark of the bandleader about the pacts that musicians made with those members of the congregation that were shy about dancing, the leadership of these congregations was quite aware of the possibilities for surveillance and emulation offered by the division of space into stage and auditorium, and was quite willing to use them in the interest of producing the kind of "close and active" relations which Durkheim deemed necessary for the emergence of "collective effervescence" (Durkheim 1998 [1914]: 300). It is the lack of both collective effervescence and individual challenges in Orthodox services that that makes Orthodox worshipers look like passive, uncomprehending spectators to Pentecostal critics – fit only to bring along a cushion and sleep, as the young pastor insinuated in his version of the sermon on the grace of each church (fig. 3.4).

With their emphasis on spiritual development through personal expression during events modeled on those of secular life, Pentecostals present an example of the "event-centered" religiosity that analysts of postsecular religion have diagnosed in various parts of the world (H. Cox 1984; Hervieu-Léger 1997). In the context of Buddhism, Gombrich and Obeyesekere identify ideals of restraint and serenity similar to those characteristic of Orthodox spirituality as essentially monastic, creating problems as more and more laypeople strive to live religious lives without detaching themselves from the secular bonds of kinship and professional life (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 452). In

analogy to their interpretation of developments in Sri Lankan spirit religion, the ecstatic

spirituality of Pentecostals could be read as an alternative way of achieving out-of-the-

ordinary experiences of the divine, one that is easier to combine with the demands of lay

life. As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, contemporary Orthodox clergy

often complain about excessive displays of soulfulness among the faithful, indicating that

they are also finding it hard to uphold monastic ideals among the contemporary laity.

Nonetheless, post-Soviet Orthodox suspicions of public exaltation are more than simply

arcane remnants of another age. If we compare Soviet methodicians' concerns about the

emotional dynamics of group gatherings to Orthodox reservations and Pentecostal

enthusiasm, we see a common spectrum of responses to the ethical challenges of mimetic

learning.

Spectacular authority in triangular critique

Not unlike religious gatherings, secular pedagogical settings also involve a particular

orchestration of human emotions (Lemon 2004). When it came to evaluating the

relationship between ends and means in such orchestrations, speakers in religious settings

could borrow secular discourses and vice versa. The Charismatic bandleader said in our

interview that the cell group organized according to the principle of twelve is both a

biblical principle and an "effective form" (*dejstvennaja forma*). In her unselfconscious

use of this term from Soviet method-talk, she seemed to identify herself with a position

that the historical origin of a method did not matter as long as it worked.[48]

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[48] At the least, this was the position preached in her church regarding the ethics of ordinary people. "People always follow those who offer a new way," the young pastor said in a sermon on leadership. "For instance, Hitler. Or for instance, Lenin, or Stalin. Lenin, for example, you have to agree, he showed ways to people.

The Soviet methodicians whose terminology the bandleader took up did in fact espouse a similarly utilitarian view, but also struggled to articulate more substantive criteria. The sense of unease experienced by some Orthodox visitors to evangelical congregations also shows an affinity to Soviet methodicians' ideas about legitimate and illegitimate constructions of authority through group dynamics. An employee of the Orthodox diocese who had attended some of the early meetings of the Christian Center, which started in 1993 in the Lenin Culture Palace, commented on the spatial organization of the service as very restrictive. It felt, she said, as if the music were placing a ring around the congregation, and young ushers standing in the aisles asked her to move closer to the front. In an Orthodox church no one tried to stand behind a worshiper, only the priest and deacon circumambulated the church with censers once during each service, and if someone wanted to leave, no one persuaded them to stay.[49] For this woman, the attempt to maximize the effect of a didactic message by means of organizing a setting of worship seemed an undue use of emotional pressure, an observation with which atheist critics of religion would have agreed.

Soviet atheists understood religious ritual by analogy to their own didactic spectacles. Similar to their didacticizing understanding of icons (see chapter 4), Soviet atheists described religious rituals as tools used by religious organizations to persuade people to follow their doctrines. This critique generally emphasized the rationality of secular didacticism in opposition to the false emotional pressure exerted by religious activists. But simultaneous attempts to give more emotional appeal to secular events also

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Yes, they were bad ones, but he showed them ways. […] My dear ones, when we show people a way, we become their leaders" (Tape of service, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, Wednesday, April 24, 2005).
[49] Field notes, March 29, 2005.

show a general uncertainty about the legitimacy of the use of emotion in public pedagogy that forms part of Soviet secularist sensibilities.

When describing Orthodox ritual, the attitude of atheist propagandists was often one of straightforward competition, leading to calls for increasing use of emotional and aesthetic appeal in propaganda. For instance, discussing results of a survey of Russian Orthodox peasants in selected regions of the Mari republic carried out in 1967-68, Nikolaj Sofronov, an instructor of philosophy at the Technical Institute in Joshkar-Ola and active in the atheist section of the Knowledge Society, found that over 50 percent of respondents who admitted to attending church named the beauty of the singing and of church interiors as a reason. This led Sofronov to a reflection on the process by which church art helped turn a casual visitor into a committed believer:

> Having been to church, having heard the polyphonic singing, having felt the influence of church painting, the person returns to the temple again and again, in order to experience himself (*oshchutit'sja*) again and again in the unusual surroundings. Gradually he begins to take an interest not only in the music and the painting, but also to listen (*prislushivat'sja*) to the words of the preacher and, without noticing, becomes a believer. Receiving satisfaction from choral singing, painting and church architecture, the person counts their effects to the credit of religion and finally begins to argue with conviction for the beneficial influence on himself not of art, but of religion. (Sofronov 1973: 29)[50]

Different from the Orthodox idea that musical beauty depends on a correspondence between melody, text, and the prayerful concentration of the performers, this scholar understands beauty as satisfaction derived from stimuli that are themselves ideologically

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[50] Like Nekhoroshkov's description of the impact of icons in rural homes quoted in chapter 6, this passage probably exaggerates the visual and aural impact that the interiors and choirs of many rural churches in the republic could have had on visitors. If the state of many churches fifteen years after the lifting of Soviet restrictions on renovation and education is any indication of what they were like when these restrictions were in force, crumbling paint, blackened icons, unheated sanctuaries, and choirs consisting of a few old women's voices were more likely to be the experience of church visitors than the rich aesthetic impression suggested by Sofronov.

neutral, and become associated with particular messages only through association with words, in this case, the sermon. Its effect is to provide positive emotional reinforcement of messages through habitual association, in a mechanism reminiscent of the Pavlovian conditioned reflex (Babkin 1946; Todes 2001: 244-248). Being content-neutral, the use of beauty in the church can be appropriated for Soviet propaganda, even though the mood of the art must be changed from "pessimism" to "optimism:"

> In order to end the influence on people of church art, pessimistic in its foundations, it is necessary to significantly improve the work of aesthetical enrichment of rural toilers: take all measures to develop folk amateur art (*narodnoe samodejatel'noe iskusstvo*), help the works of the best masters of music, painting, sculpture and graphics take broader root in everyday life. (Sofronov 1973: 29-30)

Another popular suggestion was to offset the appeal of church festivals and life-cycle rituals by the creation of secular equivalents. As the example of peledysh pajrem discussed in chapter 1 has shown, this process started in the 1920s, but calls to enhance the popularity of these rituals by making them "more beautiful, more interesting, more content-laden than old traditions" continued into the later decades of the Soviet Union (Anonymous 1963: 60). Methodicians in the 1960s and 70s often noted a certain emotional deficit in Soviet propaganda compared to religious ritual, and a failure to connect with intimate aspects of people's lives. In the published version of a lecture on the "reasons for the vitality of religious survivals in the USSR," a member of the Knowledge Society stated:

> The weakness of the emotional impact (*emotsional'nogo vozdejstvija*) of scientific-atheist propaganda significantly lowers the effectiveness (*rezul'tativnost'*) of all this work, leads people to dissatisfaction and a cold, indifferent attitude toward the events carried out. (Ignatov 1963: 211)

As a remedy, the lecturer recommends an increased use of "progressive fiction and art" in atheist propaganda, as an "arsenal of means for emotional impact on people, on their feelings and mind (*chuvstva i razum*)" (ibid). As we can see, the distinction between "soul" and "spirit," between emotional impact and the intuitive communication of content by non-discursive means, does not enter into this model, but neither is it pure behaviorism. People's emotional responses are seen as governed by rationality, and legitimate propaganda must address them as beings with both "feelings and mind." The accusation against religion is that it overwhelms people's rational faculties by forcing false judgments about the sources of their feelings of pleasure and satisfaction on them: what is really an aesthetic effect is masqueraded as dogmatic truth.

This suspicion of methods that overwhelm the intellect with aesthetic effect represents a potential problem for the idea of imitating "religious" methods of emotional impact in Soviet propaganda. Where would be the boundary of legitimate intervention? The disagreements over the Miracles without miracles are one place where the risks of trade-offs between appeals to anti-clerical sentiment and scientific education were discussed (see chapter 2). Visceral reactions against the worship styles of Pentecostals and other "sects" also suggest anxiety about the use of emotion in public gatherings.

Soviet law prohibited the registration of religious organizations whose rituals were "harmful to the health of citizens" or whose teachings discouraged the fulfillment of the duties of a Soviet citizen (Barinskaja and Savel'ev 1973: 24). Pentecostals fell under the first provision unless they pledged to defer from practicing speaking in tongues during worship. The second provision referred to groups that preached pacifism and

encouraged their members to refuse military service, including some Pentecostal, Baptist, and Seventh-Day Adventist groups. The rationale why glossolalia was considered harmful to one's health is apparent from notes contained in the observational file on a Pentecostal group that came to the attention of authorities in Krasnogorsk, a rural settlement in the Mari ASSR, in 1975. On a sheet of paper evidently containing notes for a conversation with members of the group, the commissioner for religious affairs Savel'ev had jotted down:

> On Pentecostals or Christian believers of evangelical faith:
> Speaking in an incomprehensible language (glossolalia)
> So-called "angelical tongue" in which a person converses with god – wild shouts (*dikie vykriki*) etc
> Prayer gatherings are carried out under circumstances of extreme nervous excitation, religious exaltation and fanaticism. People prepare for such gatherings over long periods of time, exerting themselves through prayers and fasts. As a result of being in the sect, "P"[entecostals] turn into mentally and psychically unfit people (*umstvenno i psikhicheski nepolnotsennykh ljudej*). There are known cases of severe psychiatric illness, cases of murder on the grounds of religious fanaticism.[51]

These notes, probably copied from instructional material received from Moscow, fit into the rumors circulating about unregistered "sects" within the context of their increased public ostracism since 1961, in the aftermath of the split among Soviet Baptists over the issue of whether or not to accept restrictive state conditions for registration (Jarygin 2004: 119-120). They also express a special abhorrence of ecstatic worship practices that would not be an issue in an encounter with Baptists. Further down in the notes, Savel'ev

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[51] GARME, f. R-836, op. 2, d. 21, l. 20-21 (Notes, in commissioner for religious affairs Savel'ev's hand, on the achievements of Soviet power in the Mari republic and the dangers of Pentecostalism, evidently prepared for a conversation with members of this group, undated, ca. 1977 [l. 18 in the same file contains a hand-written report on a conversation held December 13, 1977, which follows the same points as the notes]). Accusations of ritual murder against Pentecostals were a staple of the anti-sectarian campaigns of the 1960s, dramatized (and probably further popularized) in the film "Clouds over Borsk" (*Tuchi nad Borskom*, 1960, directed by Vasilij Ordynskij), which tells the story of a Komsomol girl who is drawn into a Pentecostal congregation and eventually crucified by them.

states that the group can register if they "renounce the perverse (*izuverskogo*) character of their cult."[52] The concept of perverse cults comes from Russian imperial law before the edict of toleration of 1905, where it was applied to groups such as the Skoptsy, who practiced self-castration as a way to escape the sinful bonds of sexual reproduction (Engelstein 1999). The Soviet state, which prided itself on having eliminated the system of religious privileges that characterized the Russian empire, was thus continuing to make distinctions that favored the routinized, highly clerically controlled worship practices of Russian Orthodoxy.[53]

In Savel'ev's description, nothing about Pentecostal practices seems to recall Soviet practices – "wild shouts," "incomprehensible language" and "exaltation" are not among standard descriptions of any Soviet gathering. In fact, such behavior seemed so un-Soviet that enthusiasts of rock music in the 1970s also encountered accusations that their practices were detrimental to mental health and incompatible with Soviet society, as becomes clear from private correspondence between teenagers quoted by Alexei Yurchak. In the same year in which Savel'ev had his arguments with the Pentecostals in Krasnogorsk, the Siberian university student Aleksandr and a friend in Leningrad corresponded about the resistance to rock music they met among their teachers and Komsomol leaders. Countering such criticism, Aleksandr wrote about the "psycho-aesthetic pleasure" afforded by rock, going "beyond [a person's] morals and beliefs – in

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[52] Ibid.

[53] In June of 1963, the Council for Religious Cult Affairs distributed a presentation by its chairman Puzin to commissioners in the regions, entitled "Strengthening the work of inhibiting the illegal activities of sectarians." The presentation contains a list of forbidden sects barred from registration, which includes independent Pentecostals, "whose doctrine and activities bear an anti-state and perverse character" (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 1417, l. 175). Other forbidden sects include Jehovah's Witnesses (because their worldwide leadership is located in Brooklyn, New York), the underground True Orthodox Church, Reformist Adventists, dissenting Baptists (*Baptisty-raskolniki*), and smaller groups of pre-revolutionary origin such as Khlysty, Skoptsy, Ioannites, Innokentites, and Old Believer ascetics known as *Skrytniki*.

short, beyond his intellect," in distinction from the merely "aesthetic pleasure" provided by classical music (Yurchak 2006: 231). Its improvements upon the classics made him call rock music "an unprecedented phenomenon of our life that in its impact on the human mind is, perhaps, comparable with the space flights and nuclear physics" (234).

As Yurchak points out, these students are creatively using the interpretive possibilities opened to them by official Soviet discourse. Soviet communism proclaimed an orientation to the future as a positive value, making it possible to argue that this communist future should include new aesthetics and new mental and emotional possibilities (236). But the idea that epitomes of Soviet progress such as space flights were having mind-altering effects comparable to rock music brings Soviet science propaganda dangerously close to settings where enthusiasm might get out of control, and where the future might provoke unpredictable responses.[54]

If rock fans could claim an uncanny kinship between optimism about progress and the excitement of a concert, propagandists searching for emotionally appealing propaganda could also find themselves dangerously unable to distinguish their own practices of influencing others from those whom they accused of exercising illegitimate emotional appeal. When it came to organizational forms in particular, discussions of "sects" among atheist propagandists sometimes came close to acknowledging affinities with the Soviet apparatus, while outwardly stressing distance. A participant in a 1959 seminar in Moscow implied that "sectarians" were hard to approach because their work was comparable to that of Soviet ideological workers, but occurred in different settings:

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[54] Similar points have been made about Soviet science fiction as both growing out of Soviet enthusiasm for science and threatening to undermine its claims to rationality; see for instance Kats 2004 [1986].

> They don't go the library, they don't go to the cinema, but at the same time each sectarian is a propagandist according to the rule book (*po ustavu*), he is obliged to identify and recruit (*vyjavljat' i verbovat'*) members at the expense of the orthodox church and at the expense of other sects.[55]

In describing how the Baptists "carry out their work," the speaker used terminology that might well describe a party department of propaganda and agitation:

> They organize artistic evenings (*khudozhestvennye vechera*), organize evenings of rest (*vechera otdykha*), excursions, outings to the countryside, but everywhere deliver sermons on themes of everyday life and morals (*propovedi na bytovye i nravstvennye temy*). They have their fund of mutual aid, give material aid (*okazyvajut material'nuju pomoshch'*). They assign (*prikrepljajut*) each sectarian according to the principle of personal acquaintance for the catching of souls (*dlja lovli dush*). They distribute hand-written flyers, sometimes even put them into mailboxes in Moscow.[56]

If one changes the word "sermons" into "lectures," the only expression that is not in line with describing the activities of a party cell would be "for the catching of souls." Which raises the question – what were artistic evenings, excursions, and lectures by the party for? What distinguished the way they "caught" people from the illegitimate pressure used by religious groups? Later the same speaker remarked that "sectarians"

> …build their sects according to the principle of a political party. During the obligatory candidacy stage for each member there is a full-fledged investigation of them, they constantly threaten them, down to physical threats. They prescribe who should live with whom, which profession to choose.[57]

Given the short historical memory cultivated by the post-Stalin CPSU, it may be far-fetched to assume that a speaker in 1959 might have recognized the non-too-recent

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[55] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 282, l. 27 (Stenogramm of the theoretical conference on questions of theology and orthodoxy, May 29-30, 1959).
[56] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 282, l. 28.
[57] GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 282, l. 29.

practices of the ruling party of his own state behind this "investigation" (*slezhka*) of members and interference with their family and professional lives. But if Soviet propagandists could recognize a certain kind of uncanny double in "sects," the sharpness of their reaction also shows some real differences between Soviet and Pentecostal understandings of the value of rational control. Pentecostals sought to lose this control in collective gatherings as a way of accessing not emotional, but spiritual faculties. Soviet propaganda, from the start, was geared more toward rational conviction and routinization rather than strong emotional excitement. Although it has been pointed out that Lenin was fascinated by the theories of the psychology of the crowd elaborated by the French psychologist Gustave le Bon (Agursky 1997; Stites 1987), Peter Kenez and Malte Rolf have rightly emphasized the very different directions espoused by national socialist propaganda techniques in Germany and those elaborated in the Soviet Union, where mass meetings and festive demonstrations might evoke enthusiasm, but were designed to remain disciplined and never pass into the passionate mysticism of Hitler's "awakening of the masses" (Rolf 2006: 303; Kenez 1985).

This suspicion of techniques that would have encouraged mass abandonment to irrationality may be one of the reasons for the lack of emotional appeal of Soviet events – in Caroline Humphrey's observation, "all Soviet rural ceremonial" tended to become like official meetings, "almost as though people can think of no other 'Soviet' way of doing things" (Humphrey 1998: 399). In his writings about the history of Soviet radio, Aleksandr Sherel' interprets this insistence on rationality as an instrument of control. He deplores the primacy of the word in Soviet mass media, all of which were treated as analogous to newspapers. Sherel' suggests that radio was treated as words rather than

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sound because the "rows of associations that present themselves under the impact of a work of radio were much harder to control than ordinary text," and this "freedom of the imagination" seemed too dangerous (Sherel' 2004: 84). In this emphasis on the word, one can see a similarity to the didactic style of worship favored by evangelicals, while the suspicion of the uncontrolled imagination was perhaps more explicitly shared by the Orthodox church.

We then end up with the somewhat paradoxical situation that Soviet methodicians saw greater organizational affinities with Protestant sects, but in their preferences for restraint and control were more comfortable with what they understood to be the Orthodox model of discreet emotional appeal. At the same time, they criticized the Orthodox willingness to rely on "the theatricality of their services" and treat sermons as optional, refusing the verbal ground on which atheists could have polemicized against them (A. A. Osipov 1963: 71).

Atheist critics largely ignore the teachings about spirit, which in Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism each in their own way distinguish religious worship from emotional abandonment as well as from purely verbal learning. As we have seen in this chapter, diagnosing the spirituality of a collective activity requires attention to qualities that unite the organizational details, material setting, and verbal-musical script of a gathering into what could be considered a common style. From the Orthodox point of view, Soviet didactic events were soulful in the way in which they maximized the potential for human participants to influence each other. From a Pentecostal/Charismatic viewpoint, Soviet organizational forms and methodical techniques could be an ideologically neutral source

of "effective" principles, providing an opportunity for spirit-led spontaneity if used by the right people.

Considered together, these three ways of correlating human sensory faculties in group gatherings point to a common awareness of how words, sounds, and sights can support each other, and a common interest in the relationship between human capacities for perception, emulation, and reflection. Approaching these questions with the help of their own theological resources, Orthodox and Pentecostal responses each amplify a different aspect of Soviet sensibilities: Pentecostals share the didactic sensibility of actions in collective gatherings as means to amplify and make effective a persuasive message. The Orthodox insistence that organizational forms themselves have ethical and spiritual significance help us see that Soviet methodicians were far from embracing a conclusion that the means justify the ends in projects of collective change.

In this chapter, we have thus encountered a new meaning of elective affinity: the mutual illumination, and magnification, of features whose significance one may overlook if considering one group in isolation. Mutual critiques of engaged practitioners are one area that lends itself to such mutual illumination, but the exercise may also remind us of a meaning of affinity we encountered in the first chapter: The relationship between neighbors who have distinct existences, but have contributed so much to each other's formation that neither could exist without the other. In the first chapter, this sense of affinity-as-mutual-dependence was palpable in the relationship between different religious and ethnic groups in the Volga region; the following chapter will apply it to the coexistence of religious and secular spheres in people's lives.

PART IV

RHYTHMS

Chapter 8

Lifelong Learning: Biographies of dispersed religion

> Самое дорогое у человека – это жизнь. Она дается ему один раз,
> и прожить ее надо так, чтобы не было мучительно больно за бесцельно
> прожитые годы...
> There is nothing more precious for a person than life. It is given to him just once,
> and must be lived in such a way that one does not look back in agonizing pain at
> aimlessly squandered years…
> (Nikolaj Ostrovskij, *Kak zakaljalas' stal'* [1932-34];
> a popular epigraph for atheist works)

In chapter 3, I discuss the closing of the last functioning Orthodox church in Joshkar-Ola

in 1961, and note that the congregation was forced to merge with that of the village of

Semënovka on the edge of town. When I asked an aged priest who had served in

Semënovka since 1976 why the church there remained open, he said laconically: "If they

had closed it, there would have been no place to sing off the deceased."[1] The phrase

"singing off" (*otpevat'*) refers to Orthodox funeral services, and the priest's assertion was

that even Soviet officials would not have wanted, or dared, to deprive the population of

the republic's capital of a place to hold such rites. For a study of the interaction between

religious and secular spheres, this matter-of-fact assertion raises a number of questions.

While I have so far treated Soviet-era practices as the secular background to post-Soviet

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[1] Field notes, June 14, 2003.

efforts of religious revival, this chapter will show that funeral rites are just one area in which religious practice not only persisted during the Soviet period, but also retained a measure of public recognition. If Soviet secularity could never quite exclude religion, neither can post-Soviet religiosity do without the spaces of secular training and skills that I have traced in earlier chapters. The question to be investigated in this chapter is thus how to think of the religious and the secular not so much as eras that succeed each other, but as spheres of engagement that coexist in social and individual life.

As I pointed out in the introduction, the concept of elective affinity encourages us to shift from questions of historical succession to an investigation of the ongoing interaction between elements from secular and religious spheres. Didacticism as a particular approach to learning shaped by religious as well as secular institutions has been my most sustained example of such affinity. In the previous chapter, I more explicitly considered secular and religious spheres as copresent to one another, distinguished through markers that differ according to theological perspective. This chapter moves down to the scale of individual biographies and looks at patterns of religious and secular engagements in the lives of residents of the Mari republic. I look at the intersection between cycles of waxing and waning dominance of religious and secular ideas in official culture with ideas about the place of this-worldly and other-worldly commitments in an individual's life trajectory and a community's work cycle. In the biographies of many of the methodicians I encountered in this study, we find evidence of "dispersion," "inversion," and "diffusion" of religious elements in secular contexts, which Hans-Joachim Höhn (2007: 36-38) considers as markers of postsecular modernity. But it is

often hard to tell if such phenomena are purely consequences of Soviet secularization or modifications of more longstanding patterns of living out different human possibilities.

Searching for the frameworks in which people lived with religious-secular divides, this chapter looks at rural work cycles, generational succession, and at trajectories of learning within the life course. In each framework, different relationships between religious and secular commitments obtain, ranging from competition through complementarity to two kinds of hybrid synthesis, which I label "recuperation" and "inversion." While secular and religious specialists competed for the limited windows of relative leisure in the agricultural calendar, secular didacticism could never match religion's hold on the final transformations that accompanied ageing and death, and largely abandoned its claims to that life stage in favor of children and youth. But such neat symbolic distinctions collapse in the spiritualized conclusions which some people drew from their exposure to Soviet science. Returning to issues of social complementarity and the rhythms of rural life which I introduced in part 1 of this dissertation, this final chapter sketches locally specific ways in which religious and secular spheres coexist with each other.

Competition: Ideological seasons

In the introduction, I discuss the idea of functional equivalence between Soviet ideology and religion, shared by Soviet secularizers and a number of secularization scholars. One reason why atheist methodicians perceived such equivalence may have been that, particularly in rural communities, their own events competed with religious observances

for the limited amount of time available for non-productive activities in the agricultural calendar.

Emile Durkheim (1998 [1914]: 307) famously argued that religious experience among Australian aborigines was a function of otherwise dispersed groups coming together for collective endeavors at certain times of the year, and that such patterns of gathering and dispersal divided the year into "sacred" and "profane" seasons. In the Soviet village, the sacred and the collective had a more tension-ridden relationship. From the correspondence of Religious Affairs Commissioner Nabatov (chapter 1), we have seen that ritual activity during seasons of collective agricultural work such as spring sowing and harvest was of particular concern to the government, because they saw it as harmful to productive activity (fig. 8.1). Increased didactic interventions by methodicians during these seasons exhorted people to focus on collective farm work at these critical times, discouraging religious festivals as well as work for individual households in the private plots (Grossman 1977; Humphrey 1998: 302-306). Soviet methodicians thus treated religious activity as an individualizing diversion from collective commitments. But the time which rural residents spent conducting and attending propaganda events was also time away from collective agricultural labor.

Summer was a critical season for propaganda work because the success of propaganda was measured by its capacity to raise agricultural and industrial productivity. Besides, travel at this time of year was relatively easy and the students who furnished one of the main pools of agitational workers were free to travel through the republic. Mobile

На развилке дорог

В летнее время проводится много религиозных праздников, пропадают рабочие дни.

— Куда же податься?

Рис. И. Бакланова

Figure 8.1: "At the crossroads." In this cartoon from the satirical journal <u>Pachemysh</u> ("Wasp"), an accordion player – an indispensable fixture at rural celebrations – is trying to decide whether to go to a village with a church or one with a sacred grove. The text above the drawing reads "In summertime many religious festivals are celebrated, work days wasted." The text below could be translated as "In which direction should I stray?," and the verb, *podat'sja*, is almost homophonous with *poddat'sja*, to get drunk. Drawing by I. Baklanov. *Marijskaja Pravda*, June 25, 1960, p. 4.

agitbrigades traveled to the villages to offer lectures and concerts during break time in the fields (fig. 8.2).[2] However, it was also a time when all rural residents were particularly busy. Harvest workers were exhausted and probably made less than receptive audiences, and the republic's intelligentsia also had conflicting commitments. In addition to lecturing, they may have been involved in helping relatives tend their own private plot or supervising students sent out to help with the harvest. Although seasons of collective agricultural work remained major times of "Soviet presence" in the countryside, as they

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[2] See the article "K vam priekhal agitpoezd," *Marijskaja Pravda,* August 16, 1972, pp. 2-3, which reports on the travels of entertainers and lecturers in cars and busses to the collective farms of the republic, where they would offer lectures and concerts in the fields during lunch breaks and show films in the villages at night.

Figure 8.2: A lecture in the fields, Ronga district. Judging from the text on the page, the lecturer is a deputy of the rural soviet. Album "Ronga Council of workers' deputies," October 1972, Sovetskij District Museum.

had been in the early decades of Soviet rule (Fitzpatrick 1994: 174), the demands of collective agricultural labor may have given ideological work a sense of urgency, but also made it more difficult.

Though sowing and harvest were peak periods for the presence of representatives from regional centers in the villages, the cultural work done by local schoolteachers, culture club employees, and state farm and rural Soviet officials concentrated on winter months. In 1973, an inspector from the regional party committee reported from one of the republic's southwestern districts that three times less lectures were delivered in July than in March.[3] Judging from the memories of methodicians and a former film projectionist I spoke to, the winter was a time of intensive lecturing and cultural events in spite of

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[3] GARME, f. P-1, op. 38, d. 52, l. 104-109 (Information on the state of propaganda lectures in Jurino district, Regional committee lecturer Aleksandrov to the secretary of the Mari organization of the Knowledge Society).

inhospitable weather.[4] But even at less busy seasons, these local methodicians were

adding to the burden of the collective's demands on people's time. A former school

principal and party secretary remembered how pointless it was to go from house to house

in the evenings, trying to persuade people to attend lectures or other events in the club –

they were tired, he recalled, and had their own animals to attend to after working in the

collective farm all day.[5] The officially determined mission of these local organizers was

to create a niche in rural life for non-productive, collective activities, and they often

found their task quite difficult.

Whereas propaganda work thus firmly associated itself with collective farm labor

and collective demands on people's time, religious observances in the villages seem to

have been better adapted to straddling divisions between concerns of individual

household and the village as a whole. As I point out in chapter 1, Mari village festivals as

recorded in Soviet reports seem to have been timed to accompany important times in the

agricultural cycle without directly competing with work – ceremonies were held before or

after spring sowing, midsummer hay making, and fall harvesting. What is more, the

documentary evidence discussed in that chapter indicates that rural residents in the 1940s

and 50s continued to think that the ritual observances at these festivals contributed to the

success of agricultural work, whether in the instrumental sense of increasing social

cohesion or in a more immediate sense of ritual efficacy.

In addition to their integration into the yearly work cycle followed by the village

as a whole, chimarij and Russian Orthodox rituals also recognized households as the

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[4] The former projectionist, who had carried out this work in the village of Kadam in 1959, told me that she gave it up for a job at the post office, because of the hardship of transporting equipment and rolls of film on sleds and working in unheated projection rooms (Field notes, November 7, 2005).
[5] Field notes, April 9, 2005.

main participants and recipients of blessing. During the <u>chimarij</u> ceremonies I observed, individuals brought sacrificial foods to the altar, where a priest prayed for them and their families. Animals were slaughtered and the meat cooked in common kettles, while the loaves of bread and stacks of cheese and pancakes remained intact apart from little pieces which priests' assistants broke off and gathered on bark plates to be burnt during the concluding portion of collective prayers. After the ceremony was over, people would retrieve their bread and pancakes and eat some of it there with the meat stew from the kettles. What remained, people explained to me, should be taken home and shared only with members of one's own family: "You bring it from your home, and take it back to your home," the participant of one ceremony explained to me, "otherwise you are giving away your family's good fortune."[6]

Food brought to the Orthodox church remained in the church as a donation, but among the objects people would carry from their households to the church to be blessed and then take back were twigs for Palm Sunday and eggs and *kulich* bread for Easter. Holy water, candles and icons were purchased in the church and kept in icon corners. Through these objects, household units participated in the blessings of the church and were also linked to a wider ecclesiastical world.[7]

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[6] A city dweller with roots in Shorun'zha, whom I met at the <u>sürem</u> celebration there (see chapter 4) and later interviewed in Joshkar-Ola, said that because of the requirement to share sacrificial food with members of her household she brought store-bought cookies to the ceremony. Different from home-baked bread and pancakes, the cookies would not spoil before she returned to the apartment which she shared with her son and daughter-in-law (taped interview, July 19, 2005).

[7] Michael Herzfeld (1990) argues that in rural Crete, printed or painted copies of widely venerated icons play this role of objects that "refract" ecclesial grace and participation to individual households. While I saw many icon prints in the icon corners of houses in Marij El, I rarely had a sense that people knew or cared which image was reproduced on them (see also Paxson 2005: 221). I would say then that insofar as icons in Marij El refract ecclesial power, they do not do it by virtue of depicting the saint of the village church or of a regional center, but simply as an object blessed or purchased in the church.

But on occasions, the plans of Russian Orthodox and other Christian clergy stood in a similar tension with the demands of household subsistence as Soviet ideological work. For the clergy in a number of churches I visited, summer was a time of special opportunities and special problems, much as it had been for Soviet propagandists. Summer weather facilitated both pilgrimage and evangelization, but they recognized the garden work with which many residents of post-Soviet Marij El are occupied from the time the snow melts until the first frost as a regrettable, if inevitable, drain on the time and energy of their flock. In his homily at the end of the Easter night service, the priest of a district center reminded people that the week after Easter was known as the "bright" week (*svetlaja sedmitsa*), and that this time should only be used for "bright" work: "Don't all go off to your gardens right away. If someone wants to work, you can help dig the church garden." Orthodox Easter Sunday fell on May 1 that year, still a major holiday in post-Soviet Russia, marked with a long weekend which often extends into the Victory Day holiday on May 9. Many people used this time to start to plant their gardens.[8] The woman who had accompanied me to church was devoted enough to the priest to attend his adult catechism classes and sing in the choir. Nonetheless, over breakfast she explained to me that her daughters were home from university for the week, and if they did not dig the garden then, she would have to do it on her own: "God will figure out who is right."[9]

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[8] How commonly Russian citizens made use of the official calendar for the purposes of subsistence horticulture is reflected in a joke which I heard on national television in 2000/01: "At the request of the toilers, the November holidays [until 2004, a long weekend commemorating the anniversary of the 1917 revolution on November 7] were moved to the first week of October, to enable the population to harvest the potatoes planted on May 1."

[9] *Bog razberetsja, kto tam prav.* Field notes, April 30, 2005.

Through that summer, clergy in the Lutheran church and in the Charismatic Christian Center addressed the issue of gardens with comparable resigned disapproval. "The gardening season is starting," said the Lutheran deacon at the end of his sermon on May 8, in which he had focused on a more official aspect of the May calendar, the commemoration of the Soviet victory in World War II, "and of course it's not easy to start this work. But I am asking you, at least if it's not a day, then at least on the day of the resurrection, the resurrection of our Lord which we celebrate every week, that you could dedicate at least two-three hours to our Lord." In exchange, with God's blessing, "all our affairs will go easily and happily."[10] On a warm Sunday after a long cold spell, the pastor the Christian Center, looking around him after the phases of praise and worship and before launching into his sermon, commented on the low attendance: "The others probably all spread out to their gardens (*po sadam navernoe raz"ekhalis'*), yes?"[11] At other times, he referred to the summer more enthusiastically as a "suitable time for evangelization" and made plans both for street theater and open-air services in the city and for exploring the possibility of evangelizing trips to the countryside. But given the widespread reliance on subsistence horticulture to make up for high food prices and low salaries (Humphrey 2002; Pesmen 2000: 32), all the clergy had to contend with the fact that their parishioners energies were "spread out" at this time of year.

The competition between secularist cultural work and religious observances must thus be seen as one side of a triangular relationship, in which both sides stand in tension with the demands of a predominantly rural economy. Within this triangle, the role of religion is neither that of a harmful diversion from agricultural work, as atheist

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[10] Taped sermon, Lutheran Church of the Holy Cross, May 8, 2005.
[11] Tape of service, Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, July 3, 2005.

propagandists portrayed it, nor does it stand in harmonic unity with the rhythms of village and recently urbanized life. Much like the Pentecostal Baptists on Papua New Guinea described by Joel Robbins (2004: 255), Christians in Marij El find that the need to tend their gardens most weekdays is at odds with their efforts to come together frequently as a Christian community. In a situation reminiscent of that among Tlingit Pentecostals in the Alaska Panhandle, who are busy hunting and fishing in the summer (Dombrowski 2001), the kind of religious activity that involves gathering together as permanent communities intensifies in the winter. In places with severe winter conditions, expansive religious and ideological movements that rely on the time and attention of activists and audiences find themselves in the particular bind that people have more time and energy at those times of the year when weather conditions restrict mobility.

The competition discussed in this section thus operates on two levels: during the Soviet era, secularists placed themselves in competition with rural religion, which they understood to be a rival doctrine. But this rivalry was part of a more general tension between commitments to different levels of social segmentation and integration, where any institution that pretended to be meaningful to the rural population had to contend with the importance of the household and the village as social units and the demands of both household and collective agricultural production. Within this tension, traditional rural religion seems to have been more successful at operating simultaneously at the different levels, while Soviet cultural work and post-Soviet evangelism more clearly fit the Durkheimian paradigm of the sacred as a byproduct of social integration. None of this is meant to be an argument about religion as a mere side-effect of the relations of production. Rather, I seek to highlight tensions between religious practices and

productive life, tensions with which different religions deal in different ways. As the next

section will show, Russian religious traditions have primarily understood such tensions as

relationships of complementarity, where different commitments are appropriate for

different life situations. The particular association between intensive religious practice

and old age adds a new set of meanings to the phrase "postsecular religion."

Complementarity: Learning through ageing and death

The priest quoted at the beginning of this chapter claimed that the need to give the dead a

liturgical "singing off" was so pervasive that even officials intent on closing churches had

to take it into account. Indeed, Soviet statistics on religious ritual consistently showed

that the percentage of deceased people who received religious funerary rites was

noticeably higher than that of children who were baptized or for whom other religious

rites of passage were performed, and far higher than that of couples who were married in

a religious ceremony.[12] In spite of these statistics, funerals received less attention in the

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[12] For example, in the Mari ASSR in 1965 (and 1967), 33.7 (38.6) percent of all newborn children were baptized; 2.3 (2[.]6) percent of couples had a church marriage; and 37.3 (45) percent of all deceased received a funeral service, although only 9.7 (9.3) percent were actually buried by a priest (GARF, f. R-6991, op.2, d.572, l. 73 – Data on religious rituals, income and expenses of religious organizations in the Mari ASSR for 1965, compiled by Commissioner for Religious Affairs Savel'ev; GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 80, l. 229 – Report from Commissioner Savel'ev to the Council for Religious Affairs for 1967, February 12, 1968). For 1973, Savel'ev reports that percentages have dropped to 24.2 for baptisms and 2.3 for weddings. He does not mention funerals, perhaps because their percentage remained stable and there was nothing positive to report about them (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 634, l. 99 – Report from Commissioner Savel'ev to Council Chairman Kuroedov, October 21, 1974). The preponderance of funerals and baptisms over religious weddings is consistent with Union-wide trends on reported ritual observance. Generalizing from Soviet sociological literature, Christel Lane (1978: 60) concludes that reported rates for baptisms and Christian funerals were stable around 50 percent throughout the 1960s, while they lay between 1 and 15 percent for church weddings, depending on the region and with declining trends over time (see also Merridale 2000: 278). The figures from the Mari ASSR seem to be on the low end of these trends, perhaps because of the tenuous influence of Christianity among the Mari population. Muslim rites do not seem to be factored into these percentages, and the numbers of rites performed at the sole legally functioning mosque of the republic are too small to have statistical significance. They probably offer limited insight into the numbers of rites that may actually have been performed by knowledgeable Muslims without state registration as mullahs. But at least these official figures also suggest a prevalence of funerals. In 1970, for

struggle for secular rituals than other life cycle or calendrical observances. For instance, they rarely figure in literature on new secular holidays, although secular rites had existed since the 1920s and were increasingly promoted since the late 1960s (Lane 1981: 82-83).

As Christel Lane suggests, part of the reason for this relative indifference lay in the philosophical difficulties of making entirely secular sense of a funerary rite. I would like to locate the difficulty more precisely in the fact that dead people were beyond the reach of didactic intervention, making it harder to conceptualize how their treatment mattered socially. As Lane also notes, Soviet ritual specialists were interested in funerals as opportunities for providing secular answers to questions about the meaning of life and the possibility of transcending the moment of death to survivors (Lane 1981: 83). But the theme of continuity between generations could be elaborated in many other contexts, for example at workplace festivities connected to the stages in a workers' career or the history of an enterprise, as Petâr Petrov shows for Bulgaria (2003: 143), or during the public commemoration of particular dead heroes such as Lenin or the fallen of the Second World War, whose role for Soviet life has been well documented (Merridale 2000; Tumarkin 1983, 1994; Weiner 2001).

Different from collective commemorations, secular funerals for deceased individuals do not seem to have been a major concern for methodicians on the ground. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union of the 1960s and 1970s, there was abundant discussion of "new rituals" in newspapers and locally published literature from the Mari ASSR.[13] The

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instance, the mosque in Kul'bash performed two naming ceremonies, two weddings, and four funerals (GARF R-6991, op. 6, d. 302, l. 70).

[13] For instance, there is no mention of funerals in a whole series of articles discussing secular life cycle rituals (newborn registration, handing out of first passports to sixteen-year-olds, marriage) that appeared in the newspaper of Medvedevo district in 1972: "Obrjady i obrjadnost'," *Put' k kommunizmu*, March 16 and 18, 1972, p. 2; "Raznoobrazit' formy, usilit' dejstvennost'," *Put' k kommunizmu*, May 16, 1972, p. 2; "Slovo o novykh grazhdanskikh obrjadakh," *Put' k kommunizmu*, August 17, 1972, p. 3; "O rukovodstve

only call for more attention to funerals that I found in this literature also locates the

difficulty in defining the proper addressee of the ritual's didactic message. In the book

"The Family and Religion," whose analysis of icons I quoted in chapter 6, Mikhail

Nekhoroshkov quotes the letter of a miner published in the central newspaper *Pravda*:

> [A]s long as a person is alive, above him there is the party committee, the mining committee, and the rest of the leadership – we demand, we educate, we care for him in whatever way we can. Because this person is ours, and we're not willing to give him up to anyone. But once he dies – then what, all of a sudden he stops being one of ours? Take him, priests (*popy*) and deacons, lay to rest the sinful soul – is that how it goes? To the dead, of course, it's all the same, but the living are looking at us! Children, grandchildren are growing! And for us also, as long as we are alive, it's not all the same what trace remains behind. We need to know that we have not walked the earth for nothing, that we have left behind something in people… (Letter to the editor from *Pravda* quoted in Nekhoroshkov 1967: 51-52)

What the author seems to be saying is that holding religious funerals even for people who

lived secular lives sends survivors a message about the fragility and powerlessness of the

secular community just at a moment when its continuity and solidarity most needs to be

affirmed. "To the dead it's all the same" what kind of funeral they receive, but the living

need to be offered a way to remember their loved one as a member of a community of

exclusively human "ours,"[14] and to face their own death knowing that something will

remain of their lives. Promoting this exclusively humanist understanding of community

would require funeral rites that acknowledged the finitude of individual life and the

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partkoma sovkhoza 'Bol'shevik' ateisticheskim vospitaniem trudjashchikhsja," *Put' k kommunizmu*, November 23, 1972, p. 3. An example of the same omission in a discussion of secular rituals distributed from Moscow via the Knowledge Society is Anonymous 1963.

[14] There is a large literature on the significance of the possessive pronoun "ours" (*nash*) in Russian discourses and practices of collectivity. For examples, see Pesmen 2000; on the related reflexive possessive pronoun *svoj* (one's own) see Paxson 2005: 82-85. An example of the use of *nash* that is strikingly close to the *Pravda* letter is from David Ransell's oral history study of childbearing practices in rural Soviet Russia. Here, *nash* is also used in an act of claiming, but in the name of an explicitly non-secular community. A woman who gave birth in Tambov region in the 1930s remembered that the midwife protected a sickly newborn by shouting "ours!" immediately after birth, to claim it for the Orthodox community ("the baby belonged to our faith") and protect it from the evil spirits that might otherwise kill it (Ransell 2000: 176).

commitment of colleagues and family to remember and carry on the achievements of the deceased. But the fact that Nekhoroshkov uses this quote from a Moscow newspaper, instead of the local examples which he gives for other secular life cycle rituals, indicates that methodicians in the Mari republic did little to counter the hold that religious institutions retained on funerals.[15]

This neglect was due in part, I would suggest, to a view of community membership as involving teachability – note that in the above quote, the membership of a living person in the secular community is affirmed through the educational efforts of party and trade union institutions: "we demand, we educate, we care" (*trebuem, vospityvaem, zabotimsja*). From an atheist point of view, there is no way in which these efforts can continue after death. Soviet atheist didactic interventions more typically targeted youth and middle age, and could thus coexist quite comfortably with a view of life stages common in local religious traditions, where secular and religious orientations followed each other through life. This view of the complementarity of secular and religious stages of spiritual development survived Soviet socialism fairly intact, though it depends on an idea of learning that was hard to reconcile with the promises of Soviet didacticism.

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[15] It is important to note, however, that the high percentages of religious funerary rites did not necessarily mean that religious observances had a conspicuous role in the handling of the corpse itself. Funeral services in the Orthodox Church could be held in the presence of the corpse (*ochnoe otpevanie*) or without the corpse, merely mentioning the name of the deceased (*zaochnoe otpevanie*, the same term as would be used for distance education, *zaochnoe obrazovanie*). Numbers for such "funeral services *in absentia*" are consistently higher than for those in the presence of the corpse: in 1966, for example, 1629 *in absentia* services stood against 447 "present" ones (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 22, l. 57 – Data on basic religious rituals in the Mari ASSR for 1966). One can imagine that many families combined private church rites with a more public funeral without church participation. That said, a relatively higher degree of involvement of religious specialists and symbols in funerals compared to other life cycle rituals is documented for other religious traditions within the Soviet Union, and other socialist countries as well (see Humphrey 1998: 422 for Buddhist Buryatia; Kligman 1988 for Romania).

The coexistence of Soviet atheist and religious ideas of life stages can be seen in the statistics I quoted at the beginning of this section. They show that the lowest percentages of religious rituals involved marriages, i.e. a ritual conducted for mature adults. Rituals connected to young children and to people at the end of their lives, by contrast, remained relatively more strongly religiously marked. The association with religious activity of these two stages of the life cycle, but particularly old age, is also documented in other ways. For instance, in 1967 Commissioner for Religious Affairs Savel'ev reported that according to his own observations and data provided by registered religious organizations, most religious believers were women and pensioners, and, he adds, most of them poorly educated Mari women.[16] In 1974, he provided statistics compiled from the reports of registered Russian Orthodox congregations to back up these statements. According to Soviet law, a religious organization seeking registration had to present a list of twenty members, and this *dvatsatka* (from *dvatsat'*, twenty) then made up the core membership from the point of view of the state. Of 220 members of the *dvatsatki* of the 11 functioning Orthodox churches in the republic, 118 were female, 202 pensioners, 181 over 60 and only one under forty, 212 had no more than elementary education, and no one had higher education.[17] The composition of this "church active," as Savel'ev called it in analogy to the party or trade union "actives," reflected associations of religion with social marginality and supported a didactic solution to the religious problem popular with the more thoughtful atheists: to offer specialized collective

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[16] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 80, l. 219 – Report from Commissioner Savel'ev to the Mari Regional Party Committee on the state of religiosity among women, June 16, 1967.
[17] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 643, l. 75 – Report from Commissioner Savel'ev to the Council of Religious Affairs, October 22, 1974. Data on the ethnicity of members is not included.

activities for such groups as housewives and pensioners, who were not integrated into Soviet social life through their work collectives.[18]

If atheist scholarships emphasized the social marginality of religious practitioners, we might see this as a self-serving move intended to minimize the significance of religious phenomena. Thus, historians of the Soviet Union have sometimes interpreted the tendency to ascribe greater religiosity to women as primarily an expression of the gender stereotypes held by Soviet activists (Husband 2000: 102-105; Peris 1998: 79-83). Others have noted the opportunities for accommodation and disguise provided by official ideas about gender and religion. With respect to "women's riots" (*bab'i bunty*) against the 1929/1930 collectivization campaigns and church closings, Lynne Viola (1996) argues that the social marginality of women and their association with irrational behavior made it possible for them to express the dissent and dissatisfaction of the whole village, while shielding themselves and their communities from official retaliation. A man might privately agree with his wife, but evade consequences for himself and the whole family by publicly denying any knowledge of her activities. During the anti-veiling campaign in Soviet Central Asia, the feminization of overtly religious behavior likewise gave men the option of disavowing control over their wives' behavior when criticized for it (Northrop 2004: 176).

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[18] For example, Savel'ev's 1967 report concludes with a series of recommendations for "the improvement of ideological work among women and pensioners, also taking into account the national specificities in the republic." These recommendations include hiring specialized instructors for work among women in party organs, renewing the pensioners' councils that existed up to 1964-65, and for the Knowledge Society to reward enthusiastic lecturers by sending them to regional training seminars (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 80, l. 221-222). A similar diagnosis of social isolation and preoccupation with *byt* (mundane tasks) as a reason for higher religiosity among women is made by an ethnographer speaking at a 1959 conference in Moscow (GARF, f. A-561, op. 1, d. 282, l. 11 – Stenogramm of the theoretical conference on questions of theology and Orthodoxy, May 29-30, 1959, presentation by comrade Pushkareva).

A similar argument about ascribed marginality can be made for the association of religious practice with pensioners. If atheist sociological studies, for instance, concluded that grandparents were the major force in deciding on the baptism of newborns even against the preferences of the parents (Solov'ev 1982), this served the interests of the parents, who had much more to lose than the grandparents in terms of educational or career opportunities. It also served the interests of the atheist activists, who could argue that high rates of baptism did not constitute evidence of the failure of atheist education among the younger generations. Soviet regulations recognized the risk of such strategic disavowals of responsibility and tried to curtail it by forbidding churches to perform baptisms of minors unless both parents signed the baptismal register.[19]

But beyond such strategic considerations, particular characteristics of rural Russian religiosity seem to have facilitated the compartmentalization of religion by age and gender. Douglas Rogers makes this argument for Old Believers on the Upper Kama River, pointing to their ideal of division of life into stages devoted to "work" and "prayer" respectively, where old age was a stage of increasing withdrawal from the affairs of "the world" and toward concerns with the spiritual formation of one's own soul in the interest of salvation. It was this ideal of "deferred religious practice" (Rogers 2004: 169), documented since before the revolution, that allowed the Old Believer community studied by Rogers to adapt quite successfully to the demands of Soviet rule, while also maintaining their religious life through relationships between "successive generations" (Rogers 2004: 110) of the old and the very young.

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[19] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 470, l. 219 (Information on the state of religiosity and control over the observance of the law on religious cult in the Gornomari district from February 28 to March 6, 1972, Commissioner Savel'ev to the district committee of the CPSU). The regulation is mentioned in the context of its frequent violation by one of the churches in the district, suggesting that parents recognized the potential for state control behind the signature requirement and tried to evade it.

The forms of old-age asceticism espoused by Rogers's priestless Old Believers may be extreme, involving withdrawal from commensality with family members and sometimes increasing withdrawal from partaking of food and other acts of severing ties with this world.[20] But patterns of association of religious practice with those life stages at which an individual is less preoccupied with activities of production and reproduction have been reported from mainstream Orthodox communities as well. For twentieth-century Greece, Renée Hirschon (1989: 220-232) and Charles Stewart (1999: 74, 109) have noted the association of religious activity with women and old age. For Russia, Tat'jana Bernshtam (2005: 241) argues that the trend in the late nineteenth century was that only women and the aged kept fasts, while younger men increasingly did not.

A similar compartmentalization of religiosity by gender and age has been noted in Catholic and Protestant Europe (cf. C. Brown 2001; Christian 1972). There it is interpreted as largely an effect of the secularizing processes that went along with modernization and the entrance of rural populations into the industrial labor force. While the Greek and Russian examples are open to the same interpretation, they have older precedents, such as the Muscovite tradition of people entering monasteries at an advanced age, after having lived lay lives (Smolitsch 1953: 262-263). Comparable to Hindu practices of renunciation in old age (Hawley 1987), the compartmentalization of

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[20] Even more extreme practices, though apparently not universally required of the entire old generation, apparently existed among twentieth-century Old Believers in the Mari republic. Commissioner of Religious Affairs Nabatov reports that some old women among them had prepared their coffins in advance and lay in them for days "in expectation of some kind of miracle." Though worried about these practices, at another point Nabatov notes with satisfaction that although Old Believers are numerous, "young people are absent from their ranks" and their faith is known as "the faith of the old women" (*starushech'ja vera*) in the villages, indicating that Old Believers in this region observed deferrals of an actively religious life comparable to those described by Rogers (GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 569, l. 83-84 – Report from Nabatov for the first quarter of 1948, April 19, 1948).

religious practice in Orthodox Christianity is supported by the general importance of social complementarity.

One way in which complementarity is expressed is through the notion that one family member can fulfill obligations for the others, most notably through intercessory prayer. For Greece, Stewart states that a wife's prayers for her husband and children, and the prospect that she will most likely survive him and mourn him, constitute the husband's "avenue of contact to the sacred, a contact for which he has depended on his mother" prior to marriage (Stewart 1999: 74). Another form of complementarity lies in ideas about different values and ethical orientations that govern different spheres of life. Hirschon notes that old people are not as preoccupied with competing with other households as members of those generations who are expected to secure a measure of material prosperity and social respectability for themselves and their children. This, she argues, makes old people able to represent "universal human and philosophical themes" to younger generations (Hirschon 1989: 232).

In the Mari republic, I encountered comparable notions of complementarity among all the religions with a historical presence in the area, often involving an association of religion with people in positions of relative marginality from collective production. A Tatar schoolteacher to whom I mentioned the problems of Muslim students at German universities, where the fasting month of Ramadan sometimes coincided with major exam periods, expressed bafflement as to why young people would observe the fast – she herself, she explained, was nearing retirement and would perhaps take up fasting

then, though it would be hard.[21] For her, fasting and increased piety were necessary for people who were withdrawing from productive life and preparing their souls for death.

An elderly couple in a Mari village whose household acted as sponsor of a regional fall sacrificial ceremony in 2005 told me that during the Soviet period they had conducted yearly family ceremonies within the house. But at that time, the wife conducted the ceremonies at home while the husband was at work, because he could have lost his job at the post office if he had been known to be involved in religious activity. The couple thus explained their division of religious labor as strategic accommodation, but this accommodation was made possible by the fact that what counted was that the ceremony be performed by someone in the household, not necessarily that the whole household be present. During my visit, it was still the old woman, rather than her husband, grown son, or daughter-in-law, who said prayers before the icon corner of the house before the family left for the ceremony, and who brought the duck the family had selected as a sacrifice to the priest, while her husband joined other men in tending the fires under the kettles in which meat from all sacrificial animals was cooked together.[22] So even after the lifting of restrictions, the task of representing the household's concerns in religious observances still fell to the oldest married woman of the house, and it was her responsibility to know the necessary prayers.

In this view of religious practice as intercession, older generations in general and older women in particular are the experts whose observances are effective for the whole family, even while younger members are engaged in acquiring secular knowledge and pursuing secular aims. Showing how intercession could be effective across generations, a

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[21] Field notes, January 18, 2006.
[22] Field notes, November 6, 2005.

librarian from a district center whom I accompanied to two sacrificial ceremonies told me that she brought no animal sacrifices, because her father had told her that he had completed a full cycle of offerings to different gods after perestroika, praying for himself and his children, and that it could be harmful if she started a new cycle that she might not be able to complete. Instead, she brought only money, to affirm her participation in the ceremony. "I don't know if this is right or not, but God will forgive," was her way of disavowing her own expertise in this matter.[23]

Returning from another ceremony, I met an old woman who treated both Mari ceremonies and Orthodox liturgies as equivalent opportunities to intercede for her younger relatives. She told me that she lived in a village with a functioning Orthodox church, and I asked her if she ever went there to pray. She said she did occasionally, but it was expensive, because she had five children and many grandchildren, and she felt obliged to buy each a candle and pay for each to be remembered in prayer each time she attended church. Now, she had prayed for everyone at the sacrificial ceremony, and felt that that was enough for a while.[24]

Although none of these instances contradicts the assumption that the feminization and deferral of religious practice at least increased during the Soviet period, they make it unlikely that these phenomena were either invented by Soviet observers or simply reflect strategic reactions of religious believers to Soviet policy. In terms of the logic of local understandings, restrictions on who could participate did not significantly impact the efficacy of religious observances, and a devotion to constructing socialist society during youth and middle age did not preclude turning to intensive religious practice after

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[23] Field notes, October 2, 2005.
[24] Field notes, November 7, 2005.

retirement. Local practitioners thus distinguished between "religious" and "secular" commitments in terms of complementary spheres linked to particular life situations. But this complementarity relied on trajectories of learning across the life course that were harder to sustain under socialism.

Wasted time, or complementarity's shadow

As noted above, late Soviet methodicians seem to have placed much less weight on gaining control over funerals than over the ceremonies that involved earlier life stages, such as the registration of newborns and civil weddings. For them, it was convenient to assume that if religion was associated primarily with the older generation, it was dying out and the future belonged to atheism (Husband 2000: 107-109). The influence that grandparents as providers of child care and housing were thought to wield over the education of young children and the life choices of young couples was worrisome, but could also be used to discount the idea that couples who had religious weddings or baptized their children counted as "religious believers" in the full sense of the term (Solov'ev 1982). All the more so, adults who held religious observances at their parents' funerals could be seen as merely indulging the wishes of these parents or their surviving spouses and siblings, thereby still confirming the idea that religion was receding into the past and was having no pedagogical influence on following generations.

Different from religious practice in old age, religious involvement of school-aged children elicited very serious responses from Soviet authorities. Soviet law prohibited religious organizations from engaging in educational initiatives for children (only parents were allowed to provide religious instruction to their children at home), and violations of

that law were among the foci of the campaigns for communist legality in the 1960s and 1970s. In the course of reporting on "the observance of the law on religious cult" in the Mari ASSR, commissioner for religious affairs Savel'ev emphasized that the priest of the Orthodox church in Sumki "makes his school-age children sing in the choir" of his church.[25] Legal prohibitions against the baptism of underaged children and their involvement in congregational life were one of the main reasons for the splits among Soviet Baptists, Adventists, and Pentecostals in the 1960s into groups that registered with the state and those that refused to do so (Lane 1978: 146-148; Sawatsky 1981). In 1977, Savel'ev asked the city executive committee to take action against an Adventist congregation in Joshkar-Ola, whose leadership had "enlisted (*vovlekli*) in participation in the divine service – playing the piano as accompaniment to the choir of believers – Sasha Trusjuk, son of the presbyter, student of the seventh grade of middle school No. 24 in Joshkar-Ola".[26]

A radio journalist's memory of what may have been the same case illuminates the lasting connection between Soviet schooling and enlightened secularity even in critical memory. This retired journalist was wearing a Russian Orthodox baptismal cross around her neck when I interviewed her in 2005, and was clearly embarrassed when I asked about the atheist radio shows she had produced in the 1970s, the same show from which I quote the *chastushki* song lyrics in the introduction. But she still spoke with indignation about one specific episode, when in the course of visiting a "sect," whose exact denomination she had forgotten, she learned that this group made children who had

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[25] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 6, d. 470, l. 220 (Information on the state of religiosity and control over the observance of the law on religious cult in the Gornomari district from February 28 to March 6, 1972, Commissioner Savel'ev to the district committee of the CPSU).
[26] GARME, f. R-836, op. 2, d. 15, l. 84-85 (Savel'ev to the executive committee of Lenin district and the city executive committee of Joshkar-Ola, January 12, 1977).

learned to play the piano "in Soviet music school" play "religious music" during services
– "this baffled me" (*eto menja porazilo*).[27] The idea that this group used the skills their
children had learned in the Soviet educational system for religious ends still seemed
incomprehensible to her.

As explained in the previous section, the uneven levels of official concern about
religious practices of different age groups made it possible for "successive older
generations" to retain the pattern of intensified religious practice necessary for preparing
the soul for death and interceding for descendants. But the transition into spiritual old age
was not one of instantaneous conversion. Rather, it required preparation at earlier stages
in life, and this preparation was disrupted through the heavy claims which the atheist
educational system made on children, adolescents, and young adults. Many of my
interviewees who had started practicing religion at an advanced age recalled their sense
of ignorance and lack of skill, along with their fears of loss as their own parents were
growing old or dying. The teacher of Quranic reading at the mosque recalled how the
thought of her own as well as her mother's death spurred her desire to acquire knowledge
and become a better Muslim. Her mother had been illiterate in Arabic, but knew the
prayers she had heard "from the grandmothers." She herself grew up with a sense that
god existed, but in school all she heard was that "god does not exist." As she grew older,
the question of religious knowledge became more pressing for her:

> I was thinking, of course. Thought, I am going on forty, thought, sooner or later
> I'll have to die. My hair is cut off, what sort of a Tatar-Muslim am I? I thought of
> myself as a Muslim, not understanding that being a Tatar doesn't mean that
> you're a Muslim yet. If people are Tatars, they think they are Muslims, but that's
> not true. Tatars are a nation, just like Germans, like Russians, like Maris, let's say,
> like the French. If a person doesn't believe, you can't consider him a Muslim yet,

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[27] Interview notes, July 5, 2005.

yes? And I always proudly proclaimed that I was a Muslim. I was a Tatar, that's it. So at forty I already started to think that, for example, my mother was old, and that I can't do anything, don't know anything, how to pray, which prayers to read, I didn't know anything. When I turned fifty, I started to go to the mosque. At that time the first abc's (*pervye azy*) started here, the mosque wasn't finished yet, we went to this temporary shed heated by a stove. I started to go there, received my first abc's there. And when I already wanted to know more, and couldn't get it here, I went to the *medrese* [in Kazan']; my mother had already died at the time, I didn't have to take care of her.[28]

This retired factory worker was born in 1942, so her forties coincided with the end of stagnation and the onset of perestroika, and she turned 50 – pension age for women – in 1992, at a time of growing religious activism in all denominations in the republic. The spirit of the times must have made it easier for her to take on the responsibility of an elderly woman to say prayers for the generations that preceded them and those that followed. The habits of life-long learning familiar to her from her time as a trade-union organizer must also have been helpful in completing at course of distance education at the *medrese* in Kazan' while taking care of her newborn granddaughter and allowing her daughter to go back to work. Although she had successfully completed her diploma thesis under these difficult conditions, she later told me about her own and her acquaintances' regrets that they had "wasted" so many years without observing prayers and fasts – if they had started earlier, it would be easier now.[29]

A Mari schoolteacher of the same generation (born in 1945), who had started attending sacrificial ceremonies after retirement, also mentioned the time her mother died as a key moment in realizing the inadequacy of her own knowledge. Thanks to an aunt's explanations, the bereaved daughter, who had spent her working life away in another district of the republic, found out how much she had to learn about commemorating the

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[28] Taped interview, March 23, 2005.
[29] Field notes, June 22, 2005.

dead. While her mother had been alive, she had allowed her daughter to visit the

cemetery whenever it suited her schedule, but now the daughter learned that graves

should be visited on the spring festival of semyk.

> Before, I didn't know either how to behave on the cemetery. I arrived from the
> city, and my mother and I [said], let's go to the cemetery. It turns out there too
> you have to know the right order. Even here in our neighbor's family, the
> grandmother has already died now, her neighbor died and, she said, appeared to
> her daughter in a dream. My daughter, visit me in the cemetery when everyone
> comes, and come through the main gate. All of us stand there and watch when all
> the people are coming.[30]

Both women actively acquired knowledge about religion in old age, contrary to the

expectation of Soviet scholars that the association of religion with old age was a

symptom of its disappearance from intergenerational transmission. But they also felt ill

prepared to take on this religiously active life, because participation in Soviet life

disrupted their own relationship with their elders, and because their own mothers already

practiced only a compromised version of religious traditions.

My interviewees agreed with the authors of archival reports in portraying the

weakening of religious transmission across generations as a very gradual process. In

1952, Commissioner Nabatov still observed with his characteristic astuteness that

although Tatars claimed that only old people were observing the fast, an observation of

two working-class families in Paran'ga district showed that they adjusted family meal

times to fall after dark, so that effectively the whole family was observing Islamic

restrictions.[31] As members of later generations, several of my interviewees lamented

having missed this religious ordering of family life. She had been able to learn little about

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[30] Taped interview, July 19, 2005.
[31] GARF, f. R-6991, op. 3, d. 571, l. 26 (Report from Commissioner Nabatov for the second quarter of 1952, July 11, 1952).

Islam from her mother, said the teacher of Quranic reading I quoted above, since it was already during the mother's childhood that the mosque in her village was destroyed. The Mari teacher had heard about prayer ceremonies in her childhood "from the tales of the elders," but had not been taught prayers herself, although she grew up in Shorun'zha, a village that, as discussed in previous chapters, held ceremonies throughout the Soviet period.

A younger Mari woman from another village, a rural school principal who grew up in an Orthodox family but converted to Islam when she married a Tatar, contrasted the religiously influenced dispositions her parents passed on to her to what her own generation was offering their children. She was born in 1963, so her parents must have been close in age or a little older than the two women quoted above. Her father, a party member whom she called "a true communist" (*istinnyj kommunist*), died in an accident after throwing her mother's icons out of a new house. But although she considered her father a convinced atheist, she also maintained that he prayed for the health of the family while cutting the bread every morning at breakfast. When I asked what words he used in the prayer, she said that as a "true communist" he would never have prayed aloud, but she was sure that "in his soul" (*v dushe*) he was praying because he always insisted that no one start eating until he had handed out their portion to each, and that no one exchange their portion with someone else. Her husband, by contrast, only cut off a slice of bread for himself and let everyone else serve themselves. For her, this illustrated the failure of her generation to pass on to their children the rudiments of religious habits and sensibilities which they had received even from atheist parents.[32]

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[32] Interview notes, January 8, 2006.

Within the popular idea of a complementarity of religious and secular spheres of life, there is thus an assumption that people gain the ability to move from one sphere to the other through the long-term association between generations within the family. If people of the last generation to have lived the bulk of their working lives in the Soviet Union complained about "wasted time," they were referring to the difficulty of making up for such habitual formation by conscious efforts of study. As I was waiting among petitioners to be received in the Orthodox archbishop's office, two visibly worried elderly woman whispered to each other in the waiting room that they did not know any of the "church rules" of behavior. A middle-aged man told them that they should use the present time of Lent to learn. "We have missed the moment to learn (*my opazdali chtoby uchit'sja*)," replied the woman with obvious regret.[33]

For people familiar with the Orthodox idioms of body, soul, and spirit which formed the subject of the previous chapter, the difficulty of passing from "soulful" to "spiritual" life was thus exacerbated by the legacy of the Soviet period. In a lecture on the psychology of ageing during preparatory courses for Orthodox sisters of mercy, a retired physician explained that passions and sins against which a person had not battled throughout life could turn into psychiatric illnesses in old age. It was a consequence of the atheist period, she said, that people were no longer "prepared for old age" after leaving productive life, because they did not understand that old age is a time for "spiritual growth" and had no habits of prayer and loving care for others to rely on, but instead carried the baggage of a lifetime of unconfessed sin.[34]

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[33] Field notes, March 28, 2005.
[34] Field notes, January 23 and 30, 2006.

Understandings of religion and secularity as complementary stages of life thus helped people make accommodations between the demands of building socialism and ongoing religious practice, but ultimately relied on a different concept of learning than that of a socialist methodician. For the complementarity to work across generations, parents and grandparents had to maintain the right relationships of care and authority within the family to form subtle habits in their children that they would maintain through lives of study and work in secular institutions. Instead, in the words of the physician, her generation of Soviet people "built communism, believed actively, worked hard materially, and did not think of the fact that our children should have been better educated spiritually and not materially."[35]

The point here is not to determine whether it is true that Soviet parents only oriented their children toward material goals, but to point to the concept of learning as a gradual accumulation of habits and dispositions underlying all these statements of regret. Members of the generation born of Soviet-educated parents during or after the war, whose working lives had coincided with "mature socialism" and whose retirement age fell into the post-Soviet period, often successfully moved from secular lives to intensified religious practice. But in struggling to remake themselves into the kind of religious adepts they imagined their grandparents and great-grandparents to have been, they experienced the limits of Soviet didacticism with its promise of speedy and endless transformation.

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[35] Taped lecture, January 30, 2006.

Recuperation: Exorcising the secular

The Orthodox priest quoted in chapter 2, who said that his secular training hindered him in his clerical service because it had given him "the wrong foundation," is another example of this generation's skepticism about promises of speedy, methodical transformation. But we have seen in that chapter that other religious denominations allow their members to see their secular lives before conversion as a resource rather than as wasted time. In this section, I briefly recapitulate the implications of the Protestant version of promises of instant change, facilitating the recuperation of pre-conversion lives as a source of useful skills. In the following section, I look at people who spiritualize the findings of Soviet science in their individual religious quests.

We have seen in chapter 2 that the doctrine of instant conversion allows Protestants to understand their secular lives as part of a past that is morally neutral, so that former Soviet methodicians who have converted to Protestantism can reflect on their secular training as a source of skills that god meant them to have. But, as a number of studies have shown, the relationship of Protestant converts to their past is never simple. Relationships with spirits and ancestors may be hard to cut off (Bond 1987; Keane 2007; Meyer 1999), social relations may evoke unwelcome emotions (Robbins 2004), and the continued weight of colonial legacies even on post-conversion lives may need to be accounted for (McAlister n.d.; Meyer 1998). Different from the Protestant converts whom anthropologists encounter in much of the global South, but not so different from those in Western Europe and North America (Coleman 2000; Harding 1987), Protestants in Marij El deal with a past that is associated not only with ancestral religion, but also with secular pursuits (see also Wanner 2007). In convert's memories, both count as

worldly attachments and states of ignorance, whereas Protestantism stands outside of the established system of complementarity.

The practices of burying and memorializing the dead, whose importance even Soviet atheists left largely unchallenged, were a prime example of difficult entanglements for Protestants. Simon Coleman notes in his study of the Charismatic Word of Life church in Sweden that funerals do not take a prominent role in its literature or discourse, interpreting this as a consequence of the church's ideals of bodily perfection and health (2000: 138, n. 21). But it might also be that, as for Soviet atheists, the dead are of relatively little interest to Protestant evangelists because they are no longer objects of didactic persuasion. The Protestant congregations I visited all insisted that there was nothing the living could do to affect the circumstances of their dead loved ones for good or ill, since all that mattered was a decision of faith made during their lifetime. The importance of such a decision is implied in the story told by the Lutheran widow about the poster her deceased husband saw in a dream, which assured her that he had died a believer and she would see him in heaven (chapter 5). Protestants disagreed with atheists about the immortality of the soul, but both agreed that death ended all trajectories of learning.

In that sense, commemorative rites were a waste of energy that should be better spent on saving the souls of living people by persuading them to commit themselves to Christ. During my fieldwork, I accompanied the Baptist Bible study leader mentioned in chapter 2 to her home village for the weekend of Pentecost, the Saturday of which was the day when people of that village visited the cemetery to commemorate the dead. Conceding that it might be of interest to my research, the Baptist city dweller came along

to the cemetery, where we made the rounds of the graves of various relatives and partook of food and drink offerings at each of them. Everywhere, the Baptist woman followed her country cousin's addresses to the spirits of the dead with an appeal to god to forgive the prayers that were offered out of ignorance, bless the living of this family, give them according to their needs, and lead them to Christ.[36]

While the prayer for the living rather than the dead may itself have had an important didactic aspect, being said so that it could be overheard both by the rural relatives and by me, there may have been other reasons why this Baptist felt compelled to invoke god in the cemetery. Many Protestants I met in Marij El assumed the existence of demons and spirits, and took precautions against associating with them. A Pentecostal pastor who worked primarily among Maris said that he told converts not to engage in rites of commemoration, because instead of the deceased ancestors, demons (*besy*) came to take the food offerings.[37] Lutheran clergy sometimes took Finnish visitors to observe Mari sacrificial ceremonies as examples of Finno-Ugric traditions, but at one point members of the congregation got into an earnest discussion over whether it was safe to eat sacrificial foods there. The Lutheran pastor's wife, an Estonian woman, said that she would sing the song which the congregation used as a prayer before meals, which started "Lord, bless this table." Invoking the Apostle Paul's words in 1 Timothy 4, 4 "nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving," she maintained that giving thanks and blessing the food would clean it of any spiritual pollution.

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[36] Field notes, June 18, 2005. This predominantly Mari village had a functioning Orthodox church but also a sacred grove in which no offerings had been made for several decades, but where villagers still observed restrictions on gathering berries or cutting wood. Ethnically Russian villages throughout Russia observe similar days of visiting the graves (cf. Bouchard 2004; Paxson 2005: 330-331). The Orthodox Church officially approves of such days as days of remembering the dead and praying for the salvation of their souls, but disapproves of the widespread customs of addressing the spirits of the dead directly and the copious drinking that usually goes along with the visits.

[37] Taped interview, August 26, 2005.

One method of recuperating the material world into religious life was thus invoking god over it. But not all problems with secular entanglements could be solved so easily. People often doubted whether or not erroneous commitments were really a part of the past. When members of the Joshkar-Ola Christian Center talked about their own lives or those of others, for instance, laughter often served as a collective commentary on the errors of atheism or false religiosity. During my first visit to the Center, a temporary assistant pastor, surrounded by those members of the congregation who happened to be present on a weekday, told me about the stealing, drinking, and sexual transgressions he engaged in during his career as a Soviet army officer. Laughter (his own and his fellow believers') punctuated his account at those places where he mentioned the practices (lighting of candles, praying before icons) by which he had believed himself to be a good Christian in spite of his immoral actions.[38] In one of the sermons delivered during his anniversary visit, pastor Aleksandr Djuba from Moscow treated secular Soviet history in the same humorous mode. Dzjuba repeatedly returned to an episode he had read about in a history of Joshkar-Ola: the foundation of the first city soviet at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, chaired by a sailor demobilized from the navy (Sanukov et al. 2004: 68). Dzjuba used this episode as a humorous illustration of the false understanding of power and authority that contemporary Russia had inherited from its Soviet past, for example when talking about the need to use proper forms of address (the honorific "*vy*" pronouns and name and patronymic instead of the familiar *ty* and nicknames):

> I think that is normal, if we have ethics, Christian ethics. We are all descended from sailors (*my vse iz matrosov*) [laughter in the congregation], but we must understand that we have come into God's house. […] If, let us say, I come to serve (*sluzhit'*), and I see that a minister doesn't receive me, doesn't respect me, I

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[38] Interview notes, July 4, 2003.

understand that the problem is not with me, but that his problem is with God. Because I am a minister of God, I serve Him, my life is dedicated to Him. If they don't respect me, they don't respect God. Therefore I can't take offense, it's their problem. May they go their own way, those sailors (*Pust' khodjat sebe, matrosy*) [laughter in the congregation].[39]

For this group, bad manners were just one example of the Soviet liabilities which spiritual development would overcome: all the *khrushchevki* apartment blocks would vanish from Joshkar-Ola once religious revival took hold, Dzjuba prophesied during the conference weekend. Perhaps the laughter was part of a process of cleansing through rededication analogous to prayers over demon-infested food: having assured themselves of their distance from the Soviet past, church members could mine it for skills and connections that would be helpful in bringing about the hoped-for revival. In this and other churches, converts were encouraged to consider the worldly context in which they were embedded, be it their neighborhood, their workplace, or their educational or ethnic background, and look for opportunities for evangelism there.[40]

Protestant recuperation thus depends on a rejection of any complementary coexistence of secular and religious commitments, but, on the other, on the idea that secular experience can be rendered morally neutral and useful. Because modes of learning were continuous across secular and Protestant engagement, the content of secular learning could be recuperated for service to god.

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[39] Taped sermon, conference "Arise and shine" at the Joshkar-Ola Christian Center, September 10, 2005.
[40] For example, during a day of fasting and study the young pastor pointed out that the Apostle Paul, before preaching the gospel to the gentiles, spent several years proselytizing among the Jews of Damascus, "in his milieu, the milieu from which he originated." The pastor encouraged church members to think about working among "their Jews," be they students, athletes, drug addicts, or business people (Field notes, March 12, 2005). In similar efforts to encourage would-be evangelists to look to their immediate life experience for inspiration, the Lutheran church asked participants in its basic theological courses to write an essay on "Missionary resources of my congregation," reflecting on the needs and characteristics of the population in which the congregation was located and the means for missionization at the disposal of the congregation. Members of the Baptist Bible study I attended frequently shared stories about their efforts to invite neighbors in their apartment buildings to view Christian films with them or read Christian literature.

Inversion: The spirit of science

This chapter started with an investigation of the tensions between aspirations to religious practice and the demands of social and productive life. But in the course of the discussion, I once again focused largely on religious adepts who seek to conform to an established religious tradition. But not everyone I met cared about consistent involvement with a single religious tradition; as Galina Lindquist (2008: 154) notes for Tuva, another autonomous republic within the Russian Federation, many of the ways in which people engage with powerful non-human forces occur "on the margins" of established religious systems. These margins often incorporate not only different religious traditions, but also Soviet science, inverting its purpose from demystifying the world to controlling the mysterious. Some people engaged in such marginal practices occasionally, for instance by attending a worship ceremony in the hope of soaking up cosmic energy. Others were highly engaged religious virtuosi, such as a yoga master and psychic healer who sought to develop ancient wisdom with the help of contemporary science. The attraction of a new-age like synthesis between scientific paradigms and religious traditions has been noted in Russia as well as elsewhere (Akhmetova 2005; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 452; Lindquist 2006; Stewart 1991: 131). My purpose in the remainder of this chapter is to analyze the relationship between secular and religious learning that it implies.

The idea of religion and science as inversions of each other has precedent in Marxist thought. In an influential formulation from his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx called religion the "inverted world consciousness" that reflected the "inverted world" of social inequalities which denied people access to the truth about

social and natural relations (Marx 1957 [1844]: 378). Soviet atheist propaganda

simplified this idea to present religion as a system of explanations that was resorted to

when experiential knowledge failed to provide convincing answers. In the words of

Nikolaj Sofronov, one of the Knowledge Society lecturers in the Mari republic:

> [O]nly at those places where the rural toiler encounters unknown,
> incomprehensible forces of nature and society beyond his control, does he take
> them to be something foreign and even hostile to him. Only then does he turn to
> god for "help". (Sofronov 1973: 9)

It is doubtful if the understanding of religion as explanation of the unexplainable captured

what was most important to local religious practitioners. In the 1985 sociological survey

of beliefs and traditions of the republic's population, declared religious believers were

asked what they saw as positive functions of religion. Although the statement that

religion "explains many questions of life" was the first option given to respondents, only

6.4 percent chose this answer. Far more believers maintained that religion helped get

through difficult moments in life (30.6 percent), prevented people from reprehensible

actions (15.3), kept people safe from misfortune and illness (14.8), or promoted the

preservation of national traditions and culture (7.5 percent; Solov'ev 1987: 132-133). But

the idea that religion was faulty knowledge about the world shaped didactic responses of

the kind of the Evening of Miracles without Miracles, designed to promote popular

knowledge of science in order to counter religion.

 Though it may not have resonated much with committed religious believers, the

idea that religion was a mode of knowledge structurally similar to science could prove

seductive to people who had assimilated the idea that science represented ultimate

standards of truth. Toward the end of its existence, the Knowledge Society moved toward

a fascination with the occult knowledge which it suspected in religion. In the year of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the brochure series *Znak voprosa* (Question Mark), inaugurated during perestrojka to popularize debate on controversial topics, covered such issues as "Fortune telling: Superstition or…?" and "Will there be an end of the world?" The answers to these questions were no longer the clear-cut denunciations of "superstition" which such lectures as "Should one believe the cards?" or "Religious prophesy and scientific prediction" had provided for decades. Instead, readers learned that since a person stood in strong ties to the surrounding world, certain bodily characteristics such as lines of the hand or the shape of the cranium could very well predict something about his or her developmental potential and future impact on the surrounding world,[41] or that the biblical book of Revelations not only contained facts about a historical ecological catastrophe, but also useful warnings about what would happen in the future if the kind of technological development that had brought on the reactor explosion in Chernobyl continued.[42]

I encountered similar hybrids between scientific explanation and religious interaction with forces beyond human control during my fieldwork, both among people with strong ties to institutionalized religious traditions and those more loosely connected. They involved a fascination with "scientific" explanations or justifications for religious phenomena, as attested in an article in the monthly journal published by the mosque community in Joshkar-Ola that explained the benefit of ritual ablutions required of Muslims before prayers in terms of a hydromassage of the "biologically active points" of

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[41] Mikrokosm – chelovek. In *Znak voprosa* no. 12, 1991 ("Gadanie: sueverie ili…?"), pp. 36-43.
[42] Est' li svet v kontse tonnelja? In *Znak voprosa* no. 10, 1991 ("Budet li konets sveta?"), pp. 42-43.

the body identified by Chinese medicine.[43] They also involved ideas about the efficacy of

ritual objects and sacred spaces in terms of their chemical properties or the physical

energy they were thought to contain. A Mari teacher and cultural entrepreneur involved

in the chimarij revival told me that one should use only pure beeswax candles for prayer,

never the cheap paraffin ones sold in church, because beeswax shared the same cell

structure as the universe and the human body. A burning beeswax candle spread the

energy of this cell structure, endowing the prayer with its force.[44] A priest complained

that a psychic healer (*ekstrasens*) had once come to his church standing with arms

stretched outward, palms facing forward, and when he had asked her what she was doing

she said "I am collecting energy."[45] The chimarij practitioner whose reaction to the death

of her mother I discuss earlier in this chapter told me a story of the common genre of the

death of a city employee after splitting wood from a sacred grove. She explained it with

the help of ideas she had heard about on television, according to which satellite images of

ritual sites in Siberia showed them to have special magnetic properties.[46]

Similar phenomena of religious practices inspired by a mix of popular science and

New Age have been noted by many observers of contemporary Russian religiosity, for

instance in literature on pilgrimage to sacred springs (Kormina 2006), on alternative

healers and patients who may or may not understand themselves to be Orthodox

Christians (Lindquist 2006), or gardeners who time their planting according to a

combination of liturgical and astrological calendars (Barchunova n.d.). In part, these

people are drawing on standards of credibility and models of thought that they learned in

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[43] *Mag"lumat v Marij El*, April 2005, p. 4.
[44] Interview notes, December 22, 2005.
[45] Interview notes, May 11, 2005.
[46] Interview notes, July 19, 2005.

the Soviet educational system. The model of the cell structure of the universe and the turning motion of galaxies, for instance, was part of the content of lectures in the Knowledge Society's planetarium, one of its tools in atheist propaganda.[47] The fascination with energy in particular has been traced by intellectual historians to the theories of Ernst Mach and Wilhelm Ostwald, German physicists of the early twentieth century whose ideas about all matter having its origin in energy Lenin disapproved of, but which fascinated members of Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik elites as a synthesis of materialism and spiritualism (Rosenthal 1997: 22-23).

But neither the perestrojka-era brochures nor post-Soviet folk practices simply involve a transfer of ideas of scientific explanation into the religious realm. The search for sources of cosmic energy leads us away from Soviet approaches to science as a way for humans to remake the world according to their will, toward an attempt for humans to remake themselves with the help of unchangeable forces. Likewise, the brochures depart from the Knowledge Society's earlier rhetoric on science as a tool to make human beings masters of their own future. Whereas an atheist radio show in 1972 proclaimed that science made Soviet people "creators of their own fortune, their own fate,"[48] the brochures' authors treat both scientific and religious knowledge as keys to long-determined destinies.

By no means unique to Russia (e.g. Langford 1999), the double inversion of progressivist science and institutional religion may point to the special problems of

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[47] I heard these models explained during a lecture for university students in the planetarium in February of 2006, conducted on the basis of Soviet-era slides and the GDR-made projector by the one remaining attendant, who had lectured in it for over thirty years (Field notes, February 7, 2006).

[48] Mikhail Nekhoroshkov answering the question whether or not one should believe in fortune-telling with cards. On the show "Priglashaem k razgovoru," produced by Antonina Aleksandrova. Mari Republican Radio sound archives, Joshkar-Ola, Tape 810 (April 23, 1972).

secularizing efforts vis-à-vis religious traditions that did not strictly distinguish "natural" from "supernatural" phenomena. Students of western European secularization commonly consider one of its driving forces to be the increasing separation between ways of knowing God, human society, and nature, which made it possible to imagine an exclusively human way of living together (Asad 2003; Taylor 2007). Even in the post-Reformation west, the separation was slow and partial (Latour 1991). As the history of the term "elective affinities" shows, Goethe and his early-nineteenth-century readers could still contemplate the possibility of a single set of principles of opposition and affinity that governed a thoroughly spiritualized nature as well as human relationships. By the end of the century, spiritist experiments violated more firmly set boundaries between faith and knowledge, but still fascinated many members of educated society (Pels 2003; Vasconcelos 2008).

In Russia the relationship between scientific and religious epistemologies is somewhat different, in part because Russian Orthodox theology had never committed itself to a separation. In writings by Orthodox hierarchs from the pre-Revolutionary and Soviet eras, we find references to ideas current in spiritist circles. For example, Bishop Feofan the Recluse (Govorov, 1815-1894) drew on theories of ether as a material medium through which spirits communicated with each other (Feofan 1991: 55), and the twentieth-century saint Luka (Vojno-Jasenetskij, 1877-1961) argued that Ernst Mach's work on psychic energy vindicated the church's teachings on spirit and soul against Marxist materialism (Luka 2006 [1978]: 5, 11-15). To these religious dignitaries, religion and science obviously did not seem incompatible, and spirits were not necessarily outside of the range of scientific inquiry.

Judging from my fieldwork encounters, Soviet atheists were more successful in presenting religious institutions as enemies of scientific discovery than in completely decoupling knowledge about nature and society from knowledge of spiritual forces. The chimarij High Priest of Marij El was born in 1943 and an agronomist by training, with experience in collective farm administration and then as a private farmer in the post-Soviet era. During my first meeting with him, he told me that Christianity and Islam contradicted science, while Paganism was compatible with it.[49] When I asked in a later interview what he had meant by that, he laid out a cosmology that picked up philosophical debates on evolution as well as theories from cosmic science and debates about extraterrestrial influences from the popular press of the time. Mari myths had long told about things that were only now discovered by science, he claimed, for instance the inner structure of galaxies and their turning movements. In addition, Maris had never succumbed to the temptation of Darwinism, and had known that humans had not evolved from monkeys, but had been brought from another galaxy (an idea he considered to be in line with recent scientific discoveries as reported in the popular press). The epistemological advantage of Mari Paganism lay in its capacity to evolve over time, which made it similar to science and different from scriptural religions:

> A: In Christianity now there isn't any development, it all holds on to the old, and for that reason I think these different sects are forming, different innovations. […] You have to develop, you have to look ahead, the universe (*vselennaja*) itself is developing, the highest one (*vsevyshnij*) is also developing, the mind (*razum*) is developing, something has to change. I am not making a religion for them, but something, in parallel with the highest one, needs to be perfected. […] Humanity is developing in big steps, but they [Christians] are always at a dead end.
> Q: And in the Mari religion it is easier to perfect the religion?

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[49] Field notes, April 1, 2005.

A: In the Mari [religion] this is easier. It doesn't have anything written, nothing written down, only for every occasion there is a myth. No laws were ever set down, never. It is developing. This is easier.[50]

One of the High Priest's avowed influences were the writings of Elena (1879-1955) and Nikolaj (1874-1947) Roerich, an artistic couple who, after emigrating in the wake of the revolution, elaborated a teaching about human spiritual progress in which the point of science was to elaborate on the wisdom encoded in such sources as Hindu spirituality and Russian religious philosophy and theosophy (Kucherova 2006). As opposed to such immutable laws of progress, part of what the High Priest considered to be the weakness of Christianity was its tie to the personal revelation in Jesus Christ, about whom knowledge not only did not evolve, but had only degraded through the process of writing the gospels, which had been "written over a very long time, invented by various people."[51]

Such preference for relatively impersonal, timeless powers of the universe recalls one of Theodor Adorno's observations on astrology in the post-war U.S. He argues that what he calls the "naturalist supernaturalism" of astrological columns is indicative of the fact that for most people, science constitutes an "abstract authority" that has to be accepted rather than understood. The impersonal source of the verdict of the stars and its "merciless" immutability creates a "pseudo-rationality" different from the "irrationality" of religion, where superhuman forces are placated or domesticated into a relationship (Adorno 1994 [1974]: 46, 51, 57).

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[50] Taped interview, February 3, 2006.
[51] Ibid. Compare also his statement in our earlier conversation, that Jesus Christ was "an image, painted by someone" (cf. chapter 6).

Adorno's critique shows his commitment to a separation between natural laws and human, or human-superhuman relationships. He would also have agreed with Khrushchev- and Brezhnev-era methodicians that the goal of scientific inquiry into the former should be active control over one's fate, not resignation to it. "Naturalist supernaturalism" is thus a double inversion of progressivist science and institutional religion. But in Marij El it also produces its own virtuosi, who claim special capacities to control what seems preordained to others.

Such a virtuoso among my interview partners was a psychic healer and adept of raja yoga. I sought him out because two of my urban chimarij interlocutors had studied with him for a period of time. The psychic healer considered himself to be a scientist unaffiliated with any religion, and his career path was closely connected with Soviet institutions of education and networks of lifelong learning. As a medical student in Astrakhan in the 1970s, this man had started practicing autogenic training, a concentration technique publicized in 1932 by the German psychiatrist Johannes Heinrich Schulz (1884-1970), and, as my interviewee claimed, adapted from Indian yoga. He left medical school when his father, an army officer, was transferred to Joshkar-Ola, and completed his studies at the biological faculty of Mari State University. With the onset of perestroika in the 1980s, books on yoga by Soviet authors started to appear, and he read the work of the Leningrad biologist Vladimir Vasil'evich Antonov on "The art of being happy" (*Iskusstvo byt' schastlivym*).[52] Going to see Antonov, he learned additional techniques, while also developing an interest in psychology. In 1985, on the initiative of the factory's Komsomol cell, he was invited to organize an "Office of psychological

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[52] Antonov now markets his books on spiritual development on the website of the Scientific-Spiritual Ecological Center "Swami," St. Petersburg. See www.swami-center.org/en/text/about_us.html, accessed June 6, 2008.

relaxation" (*kabinet psikhologicheskoj razgruzki*) at the factory of electronics, something that he later developed into a commercial enterprise together with a partner, as the possibility of forming private "medical cooperatives" emerged during perestroika. Adapting techniques of autogenic training, these offices employed music, slides of natural scenes, and texts that suggested specific "thought-images" that would arise before the mind and relax the brain.

By the time I interviewed the yogi, he had shifted his practice to healing and teaching raja yoga out of an office in the Culture Palace of the Soviet Army, obtained through personal connections. Inside, every detail spoke of his methodical expertise in creating an ambience in the service of particular psychological effects. In tune with his remark that "the color white is a source of light, it embodies the fact that humans are drawn to light" (made on the subject of Mari ritual clothing),[53] the off-white color of his coat matched that of the soft carpeting. The wallpaper behind his desk displayed the life-size photograph of a birch grove, and every one of his sentences ended with an upward cadence of the voice, punctuated with a short smile.

This yogi based his attention to ambient detail on a theory of informational energy emanated by every object, organ and person (cf. Lindquist 2006: 54-55). He had traveled to India several times and claimed that Indian civilization had refined many of these ideas, which were now being confirmed by science. However, one should not "cross over" into Indian civilization, because that presented the "risk to stay on the level of that civilization – but after all it is a civilization of the past. It has already been replaced." Instead, "one must take the most important things from it, one must understand and interpret it in a contemporary fashion, on the level of contemporary science." He did this,

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[53] Taped interview, January 27, 2006.

he claimed, in his own practice and his teaching. "I was always a partisan of science, I always urged [*pobuzhdal*] my students in this direction, that they would scrupulously conduct an analysis of everything that happens around them."[54]

Like the chimarij High Priest, this yogi considered Christianity to contradict science. But like the authors of the "Question mark" series, he was prepared to recognize scientific truths even in the Bible. The book of Revelations, for instance, contained ancient descriptions of viruses that attacked the nervous system, which Saint John had seen "as a clairvoyant," without having the scientific knowledge to understand them.

> The Apocalypse – which means revelation in Greek – is a fog for most people of the world. As soon as he hears apocalypse, for the person that is an equivalent of the end of the world. Imagine, what a profound ignorance (*dremuchaja negramotnost'*), which, by the way, is supported by many priests. Many priests find it profitable to form in people (*vospityvat' v ljudjakh*) not love, as Jesus Christ instructed, but fear. Fear makes a person vulnerable to influence, love makes a person strong, steadfast.[55]

In a further inversion of discourses of progressivist science and religion, spiritual practice appears as a teaching geared to giving people control over those things which the ignorant accept as given. The yogi claimed, for instance, that he and his students were able to take illnesses upon themselves and materialize objects out of cosmic energy. Because "a person who possesses knowledge (*obladajushchij znanijami*) of raja yoga has colossal spiritual possibilities," even the Soviet government was afraid of its consequences and prohibited pursuit of this discipline.[56]

This yogi's inversion of science into an occult discipline might be seen as a perversion of the aims of Soviet scientific education. But like North American conspiracy

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

theorists inverting the proclaimed transparency of the democratic system into a fascination with its opacity (Hellinger 2003), this psychic healer may have picked up on some tendencies already implicit in the didactic popularization of Soviet science. He claimed, for instance, that the Soviet and Bulgarian governments had themselves conducted mass experiments with hypnosis through television. If scientific findings provided tools for persuading others to adopt a materialist outlook on life and join in the creation of a socialist future, the idea of science as offering access to the power to know and control the destiny of others even without their knowledge or consent is certainly a step away, but the instrumental idea of knowledge as a key to power is already there.

If many people in post-Soviet Marij El equate scientific and religious epistemologies when they engage with non-human forces, this reveals more than a failure of Soviet scientific optimism. It is also an aspect of the elective affinity between atheist and religious didacticism which I have traced throughout this dissertation. Religions have come to more closely resemble the image in which the atheist propagandists saw them: systems of explanation and attempts to assume control over forces and circumstances commonly thought to be out of human control. But if atheist science remade religion in its own image, popularized science has also taken up a niche in the vacuum of power left by attacks on established religion.

Dispersal, old and new

The three clusters of examples that make up this chapter focus on what may seem very different issues: the common problems of cultural and religious activists to make room for their work in the calendar of productive activities; the place of religious practice in

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the life course and the succession of generations; and the intertwining of science and religion in popular approaches to non-human forces. What unites these examples is the theme of the dispersal of religion across other areas of human life. Contrary to what some people have argued about "dispersed" or "invisible" religion (Höhn 2007; Luckmann 1991), the intermittent, contingent, and socially marginal nature of religious practice in rural Russia does not always appear to be a consequence of secularization. Rather, established traditions of the compartmentalization of religious practice in accordance with season, age, or gender may have facilitated its survival under conditions of forced secularization, and the lack of prior distinctions between religious and scientific epistemologies encouraged people to develop personal syntheses rather than abandoning religion for the newly propagated "scientific world view."

What appears to be more specific to the Soviet period is a tension between state-prescribed didactic approaches aimed at a constant and rapid accumulation of knowledge and skills, and the kind of learning that sustains practices as furtive as a father's silent prayer over bread or as temporally and socially circumscribed as an elderly woman's immersion into scriptural recitation as a way of preparing herself for death. Whereas the Protestant groups to which I devote much attention in other chapters apply methodical didactic approaches to the transmission of institutionalized religious doctrine, people who combine science and religion as gateways to occult powers often seem more fascinated with the far-reaching promises of didacticism than with its methods. Different from the uncertain outcome of the slow transformations of body and soul engaged in by aged ascetics, Soviet didactic networks promised an assured command over personal and collective futures. If spiritual processes occur according to scientific law, this may render

them predetermined, but it also makes their outcomes predictable and controllable

through proper method. For people who went through Soviet systems of lifelong

education, science is perhaps not the "abstract authority" Adorno suspected it of

representing, but a seductively concrete and familiar complex of hopes and expectations.

Conclusion

Discernment as method

In the acknowledgements, I tell the story of an Orthodox priest who claimed that the devil guided Karl Marx's hand in writing *Capital*. When I told a young icon painter in Joshkar-Ola about this encounter, she neither derided the priest nor joined in his condemnation of the father of communism. Instead, she briefly paused to think, then asked me if I thought Marx would have been able to tell. Another priest had once told her that a "spiritual person" (*dukhovnyj chelovek*) always knew "where his thoughts come from, which are his own, and which are induced from outside (*vnushajutsja*)."[1] By implication, she was asking me if I would credit Marx with the gift of spiritual discernment. If the devil had attempted to suggest ideas to him, would he have noticed, or may he have mistaken them for his own?

Few readers of this dissertation are likely to worry about the devil's capacity to infiltrate their thoughts. But by way of concluding my investigation into secular and religious ways of teaching and learning in the Mari republic, I would like to point to the problem of discernment as an open challenge to any analysis that searches for similarities and differences across time periods or cultural domains. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that a crucial feature of Soviet secularity was didacticism – a way of mobilizing people into social activity through relationships of teaching and learning,

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[1] Field notes, January 31, 2006.

supported by a view of human beings as capable of speedy and unlimited change of knowledge and behavior, and an understanding of objects, utterances, and practices as tools to induce such change. I have also pointed to affinities and tensions between Soviet didacticism and religious disciplines of personal transformation, and have told a story of elective affinities between Soviet educational networks and religious attempts to mobilize human skills in the service of revival or expansion.

One question the label "elective affinity" leaves open is the one about historical causality, about the reasons for observable resemblances. In the history of anthropology, this question was pursued in debates between evolutionist, culture-historical, and functionalist schools (Boas 1920). Contemporary to these debates, Weber acknowledged the same problem when he posited "elective affinities" between forms of Protestant inner-worldly asceticism and what he called "the spirit of capitalism." As I point out in the introduction, his indecision can be understood as a virtue, because it invites a precise historical analysis of causal and coincidental relationships between two phenomena. In this dissertation, the point of positing an "elective affinity" between such phenomena as Protestant cell groups and Soviet study groups has been less to claim that the one grows out of the other, but rather to look at how practices that may have very different origins (or remote common roots) converge and give meaning and momentum to each other. In this case, preexisting resemblances enable and give a particular direction to a mutually transformative encounter. In the cases of Russian Orthodoxy or chimarij Paganism, however, the didactic assumptions that gained currency in Soviet secular culture transformed religious traditions to which they had previously been less central. Understanding "elective affinity" as an ongoing interaction thus helps move away from

the common narrative of functional replacement of religious by secular elements and vice versa, toward the question what each sphere may owe to the other in a given situation.

In all cases, I have investigated such common characteristics of didactic interactions as their future-oriented promises of ongoing transformation, and their view of human beings as endowed with uniform potentials to be realized through following a prescribed methodical path. This comparative stance has allowed me to offer an account of the rewards which committed activists receive for their engagement in the service of religious or secularist organizations. Despite observable affinities with religious activities, I argue that Soviet cultural enlightenment should be considered a secular practice, because it engaged people in a process of teaching and learning in which human experience and deduction was the source of all knowledge, and the progress of human society the exclusive goal. But in such arguments about correspondences and differences between various religious and secular didacticisms, I encounter another problem which Weber cautiously acknowledges in his writings on elective affinities: how exactly does one recognize a similarity or difference not of individual elements, but of an overall pattern or style? In other words, what can be evidence for an affinity of spirit?

When Weber asserts that the same "spirit" characterizes Protestant and capitalist asceticisms, he engages in a practice of discernment. When he first introduces the term "spirit of capitalism" in *The Protestant Ethic*, he characterizes it with the help of a "provisional illustration (*provisorischen Veranschaulichung*)" from the writings of Benjamin Franklin, but only after having noted that any representation of this spirit will necessarily be a creation of the scholar, "composed gradually out of its separate parts, which are to be taken from historical reality" (30). Later on, Weber further decouples

"spirit" from observable form by admitting that "the 'capitalist' form of an economy and the spirit in which it is conducted generally stand in an 'adequate' relation to each other, but not in a 'law-bound' dependency" (Weber 1922: 49). Spirit is thus neither an abstract concept nor an observable fact, but a complex of qualities that scholars attempt to discern with something of the morphological interest which Goethe applied to plants, or renaissance alchemists to the elements whose mutual sympathies and antipathies they were trying to understand (Adler 1987).

Positing "elective affinities" thus means making judgments about patterns of qualitative resemblance and difference. Throughout this dissertation, we have encountered people who insisted that things that formally resemble each other are infused with a different spirit, and conversely, that outwardly very different things can be manifestations of the same qualities. Where I saw a resemblance between communist study circles and Charismatic cell groups, for instance, church members insisted that the latter fostered qualities of leadership and responsibility that were the opposite of Soviet values. Where outsiders hailed ritual activity in Shorun'zha as an expression of the village's enduring communal spirit, the collective farm chairman declared it to be a sad substitute for the cultural activities that had been available to villagers during the Soviet era, but were now out of reach. Whereas Soviet atheist activists claimed that all religious liturgies equally overwhelmed the rational defenses of participants with a barrage of sensual stimuli, Orthodox theologians grouped Soviet events and Protestant worship together under the common label of "soulfulness," completely different from the spirituality of Orthodox gatherings. And whereas the yogi quoted in the previous chapter considers himself to be an atheist scientist and draws on Soviet discourse in his critique

of established religion, his healing practices could have served as paradigmatic examples of "religious obscurantism" in atheist publications of the 1960s. From the perspective of engaged participants, affinity and perversion can lie very close together.

Judgments about qualitative resemblances or differences are thus almost always open to dispute, and what is more, the rules for such disputes are notoriously difficult to establish. Weber admits that in another historical investigation conducted under a different point of view, the "spirit of capitalism" might be taken to mean something else than what he intends (1922: 30). For many of my field interlocutors, discernment as a skill lay beyond the limits of methodical learning – recall the priest quoted in chapter 2, who bluntly stated that there was no way to explain the difference between a chimarij sacrifice and an Orthodox liturgy to someone who did not see the spiritual difference on their own. Two converts I met – the bereaved Charismatic mother whose views on spiritual strength I quote in chapter 7, and the Mari school principal converted to Islam who spoke about her father's prayers in chapter 8 – mentioned a new capacity to discern the spiritual state of others as a sudden gift they received on conversion, through no learning effort of their own.

Although both women ascribed the gift to divine sources, the skill of discernment does not necessarily have a superhuman source. The idea that there are unteachable capacities to recognize qualitative affinities and differences is also a favorite trope of secular skeptics against methodical pedagogy. Theodor Adorno, for instance, wrote that true learning consisted of such skills as associating Bergson's philosophy with impressionist art, but he found it impossible to explain how to teach them. Learning, for him, had "no proper customs," but depended most of all on the quality of "openness

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(*Aufgeschlossenheit*)" in the learner, "the capacity to let something intellectual come close" (Adorno 1971: 40).

If it is true that discernment defies methodical learning, explanation, and reasonable dispute, a proper stance for historical anthropology may be to analyze the divergent grounds on which historical actors make and dispute claims to discernment, without committing to the kind of description of the overall "spirit" of a phenomenon that Weber dared to propose. At the least, scholarly analysis can refrain from making the value judgments which historical actors are said to inscribe in their practices of discernment. If some of my ethnographic and archival interlocutors discern an affinity between icons and propaganda posters, I may insist on the difference between purely didactic media and those that are only occasionally used for didactic purposes. Going beyond analytical toward normative distinctions would seem to violate the social sciences' claim to secularity-as-absence-of-absolutes. It would certainly make the work of empirical research easier if moral norms could be left to the theologians of all sides to establish and debate. There were many moments during my research when I was grateful for the option of such professional secularity. It still allows me, for instance, to plead ignorance on the question whether Marx would have known diabolical whispers from his own thoughts.

But the boundary between the morphological-descriptive and normative aspects of scholarly discernment is not always easy to maintain, and both Soviet secularism and various forms of religiosity have provoked more committed responses. The title of one history of Soviet science suggests that the Knowledge Society's politically motivated popularizations constituted a "perversion of knowledge" (Birstein 2001). How close an

analysis of symbolic inversions can come to the charge of perversion is also palpable in

Adorno's work on occultism. He repeatedly emphasizes the "overrealism" of occult

language, showing how it inverts enlightenment strivings for a rational spirit into the

service of irrationality (Adorno 1994 [1974]: 51). With the help of the deliberately mixed

metaphors of "millennial capitalism" and "occult economies," John and Jean Comaroff

(2000) proclaim affinities between emergent religious phenomena and neoliberal

economies, based in their common perversion of previous ideals of social and economic

emancipation. Whether the aim is a simple defense of the idea of scientific rationality or a

dialectical critique of its shaky foundations, none of these scholars is afraid to judge a

historical phenomenon as the perversion of an original idea.

Among scholars of contemporary religion, many seem wary of such normativity.

In their understanding, the importance of religion in what some are calling a postsecular

world forces the scholar to distrust her own capacities for discernment, because it

challenges common narratives of modernity. Encounters with "the repugnant cultural

other" (Harding 1991) or "docile agent" (Mahmood 2001), people "at once too similar to

anthropologists to be worthy of study and too meaningfully different to be easily made

sense of" (Robbins 2003: 192), have led a number of anthropologists to adopt a method

of distrust against the assumptions that inform their discerning impulses.

Before falling into the extremes of either normative confidence in one's own

discerning capacities or systematic distrust of them, it may be helpful to remember that

discernment presents difficulties for secular and religious adepts alike. Perhaps the reason

why it eludes methodical directives is that it depends on a kind of attention that is

different from being hailed into a public. The way of being attentive that Adorno calls

"openness" is a virtue incumbent on the observer, not a response to an object made to attract attention.[2] In approaching the Soviet and Russian materials, being attentive means questioning if secularism is always adequately described when it is equated with liberal modernity, and prying into the details of the pedagogical methods that gave realizable form to secularist aspirations in the Soviet countryside. Attentive openness also means getting over the shock of realizing that religion is still a relevant motivation for people's actions in the twenty-first century, and shifting focus from the general contrast between secular and religious modernities toward the subtler differences within each camp.

A general contrast between liberalism and religious disciplines, for instance, fails to capture the spectrum of stances within secularist and religious traditions toward such issues as mental imaginings and collective enthusiasm. Debates about straightforward continuities or breaks between "the religious" and "the secular" fail to capture the tensions between Bolshevik ideas of rational transmission of messages and Orthodox reservations against soulful daydreaming that inform their shared distaste toward collective ecstasy. One does not have to get embroiled in debates about whether or not some music is inspired by the devil to notice that not every church that plays rock music does so simply for its entertaining, crowd-pleasing qualities. And finally, it may be worth asking if secularism is really hegemonic enough in today's world to warrant the intellectual ferocity of some of the critique against it.

What follows from attention is not necessarily normative judgment, but rather interest, or, in the words of one of the characters who discuss chemical affinities in

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[2] I am indebted here to Charles Hirschkind's attentive observation of a shift in the locus of responsibility for attention in Islamic homiletics. Older schools, which Hirschkind traces to ancient Greek rhetoric, tended to assume that acceptance of speech about divine truth reflected the spiritual state of the listener. Contemporary preachers who distribute their sermons on cassette tapes, by contrast, consider it part of their task to attract the attention of reticent listeners (Hirschkind 2006: 40).

Goethe's novel, the sympathetic sense of "participation" (*Teilnahme*) which grows in the process of attentive observation (Goethe 1959 [1809]: 38). One might think of Hirokazu Miyazaki's remark that his study of Fijian hope is "not so much a study of the hope of others as an effort to recapture that hope" as a scholarly method, together with his later warning that if the investigator simply seeks to replicate the hope of those studied, its forward movement becomes preempted into retrospective repetition (Miyazaki 2004: 25, 127). If I have been pursuing the spirit of didacticism through its fits and misfits with religious practices, it is above all because I place some hope in the human capacity to learn, a hope that I share with many of the people I encountered in the Mari republic, be it in archival documents or in the flesh. For the sake of such common hope, sympathetic attention may permit itself to notice differences between religious traditions that have fewer qualms about using ritual means to maximize didactic influence than had professionals of secularist propaganda, and those that expect adepts to distinguish between the origin of different voices.

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